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The ROCKEFELLER PANEL REPORT  
on American Democracy

# The Power of the Democratic Idea

Special Studies Project Report VI  
Rockefeller Brothers Fund

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THE POWER  
OF THE  
DEMOCRATIC IDEA

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# THE POWER OF THE DEMOCRATIC IDEA

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## Foreword by the Overall Panel

Democracy is a powerful idea. It is powerful because it respects the desire of every man to share in his own rule. It is powerful because it is based on the belief that every man has the capacity to learn the art of self-government. And it must be clear to everyone everywhere that a belief in this capacity and a recognition of this desire speak to the deepest and most pervasive aspirations of modern man.

Democracy is a powerful idea because it draws much of its strength from religions that posit the sanctity of the individual and the brotherhood of man. In a democracy, as in a moral order, none can be excluded, none left out. In a democracy, responsibility for everyone rests in some measure upon all.

Democracy is a powerful idea because it both assumes and is built upon the moral commitment of its supporters. It will require all the power this commitment can generate in the decades ahead to deal affirmatively and courageously with the vast and pressing problems faced by all countries of today's world. But to do so without sacrificing the real source of democracy's permanent strength—the independence and integrity of its citizens—will require the very best that is in each of us, all the time, for as long as we can see.

And so we present this report—a realistic yet hopeful statement of the idea of democracy as it has found expression in the American scene. It recognizes the central problems of our democratic society but does not despair about the prospects for their resolution. Not all of us will agree in all particulars. But we believe it is an honest picture of our democratic system and its prospects. We are sobered as we reflect on the tasks to be performed, yet confident in the power of the democratic idea to help us perform these tasks and maintain our liberties.

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The Overall Panel members are grateful to a writing committee chaired by James A. Perkins. Charles Frankel was the principal author involved in the preparation of this report and should, therefore, receive our special thanks.

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## Introduction

The history of the last three centuries is in large part the history of the democratic impulse. Democratic aspirations have moved with mounting force in the world, and any people that has felt their contagion has never been the same afterward. Masquerades of democracy have sometimes been taken for the real thing. The power of democratic ideals is now so great that even the most militant opponents of democracy must speak the language of democracy to justify themselves to those they rule. A fundamental reason why our era is so unsettled and turbulent is simply that the attraction of democratic ideals has come to be felt everywhere in the world. It is the democratic dream that is keeping the world on edge.

The story of modern democracy is more than the story of an aspiration. It is also a story of practical accomplishment. Democratic social institutions have steadily expanded, giving ordinary men and women opportunities they never had before to educate themselves, to enjoy the good things of life, and to take part, as free citizens, in the great enterprises of human civilization. And although free democracies are rare occurrences in the history of mankind, the governments that have endured unchanged in form for the longest time in the modern world are almost without exception democratic. Modern democracy has known defeats as well as victories, and there are dark spots in its history as well as signal achievements. But modern democracies have repeatedly shown that they have an inner gristle and that they can outlast other social systems when their citizens have the education, habits, and courage that make democracy work.

Yet this record of accomplishment offers no guarantee for the future. For the problems that democracy faces today are in many respects unprecedented. Science, technology, and economic expansion have produced a world that is shrunken in size, immeasurably larger in the number of its inhabitants, and almost unimaginably quicker in its tempo of change. Mass production, mass communication, and large organizations have

changed the normal context in which most citizens of industrial societies lead their lives. In the more prosperous countries there is an era of high consumption and growing leisure that requires democratic citizens to develop a new sensibility and a new personal ethic. There is an explosive demand for education at all levels, an urgent need for technical skills and social imagination, and a redoubled effort by those who have been victims of racial prejudice to be admitted to free and equal partnership in the democratic enterprise. And in the less prosperous countries people who have never known democracy have also been touched by its spirit. They are pressing for full citizenship in their societies, for a decent share of the world's goods, and for a chance to educate their children. Whether they can move toward these goals within a framework of freedom, and whether the peace of the world can be preserved while they do, remains to be seen. And as democracies wrestle with these problems they must face the steady dangers of the totalitarian challenge.

The preceding reports of the Special Studies Project have dealt with questions of national defense, foreign economic policy, the national economy of the United States, education and the nurturing of talent, and foreign policy. These are questions with which the United States must deal if it is to maintain and strengthen its own democratic system and if it is to play its necessary role on the world scene. An even deeper question is whether American democracy can act with the force, resolution, and imagination necessary to meet the problems it faces in the second half of the twentieth century.

A report such as this can provide only the beginning of an answer to this question. In the final analysis it can be answered only by what Americans do in their governments, their private organizations, and their daily lives. But a study such as this can do two things. It can state reasons why democracy is worth working at, and it can examine the American democratic process in an effort to see what resources Americans have at their disposal for meeting the problems they confront.

Certain self-imposed restrictions have been accepted in writing this report. We deal with ideals that Americans share

with many other people, but our focus is on the special means and methods by which Americans have come to pursue these ideals. This study does not pretend to describe democracy as it is or must be elsewhere in the world; it is an attempt to help Americans appraise what they are doing in their own democracy. While it is not easy for men to maintain an objective attitude when they are examining a way of life to which they are passionately committed, we have made the effort to describe the processes of American democracy as realistically as possible and to distinguish between what is essential to democracy and what is not. Where American actions, in our judgment, are not in accord with American democratic principles, we have said so; and where conceptions of democracy that are current in America seem to us to be mistaken, we have pointed this out. We have tried, in short, to follow the ancient maxim "know thyself" in the belief that this is the way in which American democratic principles and practices can be clarified and strengthened. Such a belief, we cannot help but think, lies at the very heart of the democratic faith.

We have also tried to do something more. For nearly two centuries the American democracy provided the rest of the world with a testing place for democratic principles. It is still a testing place for these principles. And the test these principles must meet is the same test they have had to meet in the past: they must demonstrate their power to generate visions, to set programs in motion, to lift Americans above mere getting and spending, and to kindle the hopes of people elsewhere. At the greatest moments in the American past, Americans had an image before them of what free men, working together, could make of human life. The great question that the present generation of Americans will answer is whether the American democratic adventure can be continued and renewed and whether American life can be lit by a sense of opportunities to be seized and great things to be done. This report is an effort to indicate that the problems America faces today, although they are heavy, are not burdens but invitations to achievement.

# I. The Ideals of Democracy

Every society gives spontaneous signs of the moral weather in which it normally lives. The attitudes of the men and women who compose it will be revealed in their manners, in their behavior toward their parents, their children, and one another, in the atmosphere of their schools, churches, and public squares, in their games and jokes. What the members of a society expect in life and what they think is right and decent will show itself not only in what they explicitly say but in what they do not bother to say.

This is as true of a democratic society as it is of any other. Because democracy gives so much freedom to the individual and leaves so much to his powers of judgment and self-discipline, it depends more than most other forms of government on an unspoken atmosphere and on the willing allegiance of most of its citizens to certain moral principles. A democratic form of government may exist in a society where this atmosphere and moral outlook are weak or still in the process of development. But in any society where democratic government can be said to be reasonably safe, certain attitudes will be deeply ingrained and certain ideals will be widely shared.

What are the fundamental ideals that distinguish a democratic moral outlook?

## DEMOCRACY'S COMMITMENT TO AN OPEN SOCIETY

A distinctive conviction marks a democratic society. One part of this conviction is that all human arrangements are fallible. A second part is that men can improve the societies

they inhabit if they are given the facts and are free to compare things as they are with their vision of things as they ought to be. It is a defining characteristic of a democratic society, accordingly, that nothing in its political or social life is immune to criticism and that it establishes and protects institutions whose purpose it is to subject the existing order of things to steady examination.

This process of self-examination has certain special features. It is conducted in the open. All members of the community are presumed to be free to engage in it, and all are held to be entitled to true information about the state of their society. Moreover, in a democratic society such public criticism has immediate and practical objectives. Men who are imbued with the democratic attitude are not likely to be content with the promise that the realization of their ideals must be put off to an indefinite future. They will want to see these ideals make a difference here and now.

A commitment to democracy, in short, is a commitment to an "open society." Democracy accepts its own fallibility. But it provides a method by which its mistakes can be corrected. It recognizes that men can be power-hungry and prone to self-delusion, that they can prefer old errors to new truths, that they can act without caring about what they are doing to others. And it believes that these human tendencies can only be held in check if they are exposed to the open air and subjected to other men's continuing judgment. This is the way, in the democratic view, that the goodness and rationality of men can have a chance to grow.

#### EQUAL MEMBERSHIP IN THE MORAL COMMUNITY

This belief in a process of criticism that is open to all brings us to another fundamental principle of a democratic outlook. The man with democratic feelings and convictions looks upon all men as members of the same moral community and as initially endowed with the same fundamental rights and

obligations. He does not determine his obligations to others by considering their status in society or their racial or religious backgrounds. The respect and concern which a democratically-minded person shows for other men is shown for them as individuals; it does not depend on their membership in any group.

Ideas which have kindled the struggle for democracy in the modern world—the rights of man, the dignity of the individual—have expressed this attitude. In this sense, the history of democracy records the growth in scope of man's sense of moral concern. Moreover, this democratic moral sense generally implies something not only about the goals that men should seek but the spirit in which they should seek them. A man of democratic temper will pursue human welfare, but he will not do so in a context of rigid ranks and hierarchies. For he seeks more than the improvement of men's material condition, he seeks their development as independent individuals and their entrance as full participants into the enterprises of their community. To believe in democracy is to wish to help individuals by giving them the tools to help themselves.

#### RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUAL DIVERSITY AND PRIVACY

This sense that all men have an initially equal right to membership in the same moral community suggests another element in the democratic image of the good society. This is the acceptance of the simple fact that human beings are different. It is one thing to believe that all men have a right to be treated in accordance with the same fundamental rules. It is quite another thing to believe that there is any single style of life that is good for everybody. The democratic view is that the burden of proof rests on those who argue that the individual is not the best judge of the way to run his own life. To care about democracy is to care about human beings, not en masse, but one by one. It is to adopt the working hypothesis

that the individual, if given the right conditions, does not need a master or a tutor to take care of him. The devoted believer in democracy will act on this hypothesis until he is proven wrong. And he will act on it again when the next individual comes along. For he believes that the exercise of individual judgment is itself an ultimate good of life.

A considered democratic outlook will therefore place a special premium on the value of privacy. It will hold that there are aspects of the individual's life that no government may touch and that no public pressure may be allowed to invade. In the absence of very strong considerations to the contrary, these include the individual's right to bring up his children as he desires, to go where he wishes, to associate with those he chooses, and to live by his own religion and philosophy, staking his destiny on the rightness of his choice.

There is, therefore, an extraordinary degree of human discipline involved in allegiance to a democratic ethic. It asks men to exercise their own judgments and to choose their own ultimate beliefs. But it asks them to care just as much about the liberties of others and the right of others to think differently. That such a discipline has actually been developed, and that it thrives at all, is a remarkable achievement. It is testimony to democracy's faith in the power of human intelligence and good will. But the very difficulty of this discipline indicates that the citizens of a democracy can never take the continued success of their social system for granted. There is always the temptation to relax such a discipline or to resent it. The survival of this discipline calls for constant vigilance.

#### GOVERNMENT BY CONSENT

Obviously, a society that accepts the moral ideals that have been described can never say that its work is done. Nor can such a society have a neat and symmetrical design. It will be a mobile society without fixed class barriers, offering opportunities to individual talents and providing an arena within



which diverse individuals can struggle for the achievement of their own purposes. Inevitably, furthermore, it will be a society in which groups clash and contend with one another and in which the determination and implementation of public policy must depend on something other than unanimous agreement.

We come at this point to a distinguishing feature of democracy as a political system. Democratic political arrangements rest on the recognition that shared purposes and cooperative endeavor are only one side of any complex society and that disagreement and conflict of interests are also persisting characteristics of any such social order. The working principle of a democracy is to deal with such conflicts by bringing them out in the open and providing a legal and social framework for them. It is this principle that gives a distinctive meaning to the classic political ideal of democracy—the ideal of government by the consent of the governed—as it is understood in the United States and other democracies, and that sets off the theory and practice of these democracies from totalitarian forms of government which use and abuse democratic language.

In the American tradition, "the consent of the governed" has meant a number of things. It has meant, to begin with, that public policies should be subject to broad public discussion, that political leaders must be chosen in free elections where there is honest competition for votes, and that no one is punished or restrained, legally or extralegally, when he works for the political cause of his choice and remains short of violence and insurrection. But government by consent has also meant some things that are perhaps less obvious. For public discussion, free and honest elections, and the rights to freedom of speech and association are essential to achieving government by consent; but the history of democracy in the last century is marked by the growing recognition that they are not sufficient.

In addition to the legal guarantees that are implied by the ideal of government by consent, certain broad social conditions are also implied. Individuals with grievances, men and women with ideas and visions, are the sources of any society's power to improve itself. Modern democracy is an effort to

provide such individuals not only with the freedom to struggle for what they think right but with some of the practical tools of struggle. Government by consent means that such individuals must eventually be able to find groups that will work with them and must be able to make their voices heard in these groups. It means that all important groups in the community should have a chance to try to influence the decisions that are made. And it means that social and economic power should be widely diffused in the community at large, so that no group is insulated from competition and criticism. The maintenance of such conditions is the steady business of a democratic society.

What such a society seeks is responsible government. Moreover, it seeks this ideal in a special way. Judged from its working procedures, a democracy does not define "responsible government" as government by men who are benevolent, intelligent, and unselfishly interested in the general welfare. Naturally, a democracy seeks such men, and it will prosper if it finds them. But in aiming at responsible government, a democracy has its eye mainly on institutions not persons. No matter how able its leaders, or how morally responsible they are as individuals, it reposes only a careful and limited confidence in them.

From the democratic point of view, a government is a responsible government only when those who make the decisions on which other men's destinies depend can be held effectively accountable for the results of their decisions. This means that they can be asked questions, that they have to give answers which satisfy those who ask them, and that they can be deprived of their power if they fail to do so. It means, moreover, that the decision-makers in a society are visible and that it is possible to fix responsibility for a policy on definite individuals or groups. Finally, it means that those who ask the questions must know how to ask the right ones and must have sufficient information and good sense to judge the answers they receive intelligently. To list these criteria of responsible government is to remind ourselves not only of what democracy has achieved but of how much still remains to be accom-

plished and of new and urgent problems that have emerged in the present generation.

Thus, the ideal of government by consent involves more than free elections and constitutional government. It calls for the existence of instruments of communication that men can use to get in touch with one another when they wish to join together in a common cause. It demands that these instruments of communication be generally available to the community rather than monopolistically controlled. It requires the existence of independent groups that can give expression to the diverse interests that are bound to prevail in any sophisticated modern society and that can do so openly, legally, and without fear of persecution. It requires that these groups be democratically controlled. Most of all, if government by consent is to work over the long pull, it needs the support of a population in which the average level of education is high. A people that dedicates itself to free government cares about its schools as it will care about little else. Government by consent does not exist once and for all, and a people cannot passively enjoy it. They must steadily create it.

Free government thus depends on men and women who possess a subtle blend of skills and attitudes. The ideal citizen of a democracy has enough spirit to question the decisions of his leaders and enough sense of responsibility to let decisions be made. He has enough pride to refuse to be awed by authority and enough humility to recognize that he, too, is limited in knowledge and in the power to be perfectly disinterested. And while he is good humored when others win fairly, he is implacable toward those who play unfairly. Such qualities of mind and character are not easily come by, but they are the secret, the inner mystery, of a flourishing democracy.

#### THE DEMOCRATIC WAGER

Democratic ideals, like any other ideals, do not exist in a void. They rest on assumptions and express a faith. There

is an ultimate conviction and a supreme act of faith behind the ideals of democracy. The conviction is that the value of all human arrangements must be measured by what they do to enhance the life of the individual—to help him to grow in knowledge, sensitivity, and the mastery of himself and his destiny. The faith is that the individual has the capacity to meet this challenge.

The faith must be stated carefully, for it is complex and subtle. Restraints that democracies place on the men who govern them are based on a tough and realistic conception of the actual character of human beings. Constitutional government is a conscious effort to place checks on the power of all individuals; it foresees no time when men can afford to assume that any among them are free from imperfection. "Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself," Jefferson once observed. "Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him?"

Jefferson's remark catches both sides of the democratic faith. Democracy does not expect men to be angels; but it does not propose to treat them, therefore, as sheep. The great wager on which it stakes its destiny is that the imperfectible individual is improvable. And it believes that the best way to improve him is to let him improve himself, to give him as much responsibility as possible for his own destiny and for the destiny of the community to which he belongs. Democratic governments have been prepared to take positive steps to free the individual from avoidable handicaps so that he can run the race on fair terms with others. They are committed today to providing all individuals with the basic forms of economic security that are essential to a decent life. But their objective is not to produce tame, well-tended men and women who are easy to harness to a master plan. Their objective is to release the powers of individuals and to turn loose the flow of human initiative.

There is, therefore, a kind of inner tension that is perennially present in the democratic way of life. A democracy

must balance its faith in the potentialities of the individual against its realistic appraisal of his capacities for judgment and responsible behavior. It cannot simply give him room to live his own life; it must also place restrictions upon him. Each generation must make new decisions on this issue, and there is no easy formula by which the questions it raises can be settled. In large measure men must deal with them by deciding what they wish human life to be and placing their faith and effort on that side of the scales. Democracy, if it must err, chooses to err by trusting the ordinary individual. If it must choose between what he is and what he can be, it leans in the latter direction and places its long-range bet on what he can be.

This faith and purpose give dynamism to the democratic principles that have been described. A democracy's commitment to the continuing criticism of itself is not due to an inner malaise or lack of confidence. It expresses the belief that nothing deserves a higher loyalty from men than the truth and that the only way in which fallible men can find the truth is to keep the process of inquiry open. Democracy bets that men can bear the rigors of this process and learn to love it. And it bets that it will be a stronger social system as a result. For it is the one form of society which has institutionalized the process of reform.

A democracy, therefore, will measure its success in a distinctive way. In the last analysis it will judge itself by the character of the men and women who make it up and the quality of the lives they lead. A democratic society cannot be indifferent to the condition of its economy, the development of its technology, or the material possessions in the hands of its people. It is dangerous sentimentality to think that such issues are unimportant either practically or morally. But a democratic society that has kept its balance and sense of direction will recognize that they are means not ends. The end is the individual—his self-awareness, his personal powers, the richness of his life. Democracy aims at the individual who can live responsibly with his fellows while he follows standards he has set for himself.

### A DEMOCRACY'S NEED TO BE ON THE MOVE

There are many reasons for believing that this democratic wager has been worth making. In the United States, a continental nation has been governed. Successive waves of immigrants have been absorbed into a common way of life, and their children have found the opportunities for which their parents came. American democracy has gone far in delivering men from poverty, in releasing them from the stifling boxes of caste and class, in opening careers to talent, and in making performance rather than inheritance the key to men's positions in life. And having accomplished its great absorbing work of settling a continent, American democracy has gone on to other tasks and carried them off with equal *élan*.

Within the last generation it has modernized its economic system and fought, together with its Allies, a victorious war against an extraordinary threat to the values of all civilized men. It has turned almost overnight from a long policy of isolation to one of active participation in keeping the peace of the world. It has shown itself capable of original social inventions like the Marshall Plan abroad and the Tennessee Valley Authority at home. It has accomplished all this, furthermore, while preserving individual freedom and extending it at many points. American democracy has shown that it has resilience, flexibility, and the power to meet emergencies. The achievement justifies the democratic faith that free citizens can successfully work out their problems together if they are given the chance to try.

While a democracy can take confidence from its past accomplishments, it cannot live on them. Democracy is a system which aims at the minimum of coercion and the maximum of voluntary cooperation. If it is to excite men's devotion it needs to be on the move, and it needs citizens who are alert to the business they have left unfinished and the new business they must undertake. The citizens of America have an educational system that needs strengthening. The problem of mass media of communication as a source of public information and

not only as a form of entertainment, intensified by the coming into existence of television, has only begun to receive the attention it requires. The elimination of racial barriers is another piece of unfinished business, and time is growing short. The American people have only begun to realize the extraordinary perils for them and for all humanity in the contrast between their own wealth and the poverty of most of mankind.

Not least, few have as yet asked themselves, earnestly and steadily, what their prosperity is for and where their real wealth lies. A transition to an economy of comfort has been made, but the development of discriminating standards and the projection of goals that will excite the imagination of the concerned citizens of America has still to come. In the past, Americans have responded well when confronted by immediate emergencies and obvious injustices. The great question is whether a comfortable people can respond to an emergency that is chronic and to problems that require a long effort and a sustained exercise of will and imagination.

### QUESTIONS DEMOCRACY MUST FACE

The marshaling of democratic energies will have to take account of emerging conditions that obscure the democratic idea at many points and challenge its viability at others. The questions American democracy now faces range from the rebuilding of American cities to the proper organization and encouragement of scientific research, from the coordination of our foreign activities to the coordination of the activities of our state and federal governments, and from the allocation of our national wealth between public and private purposes to the development of new skills in the use of leisure. But underneath these and the myriad other problems that confront the United States there are certain long-range conditions with which our country, as a country in the modern world, must deal.

First and foremost, it faces the problem of keeping the peace and the related problem of maintaining the climate of

freedom, at home and in the world, through a prolonged period of international tension. American democracy confronts a massive challenge—the rise to power of enormous nations charged with a sense of mission and governed by men who have set out to prove that our social order cannot keep up the pace if it is put to the test of serious and sustained competition. America today must obey an ultimate imperative—the imperative to survive and to survive in freedom. It must do so while the world confronts the unprecedented danger of nuclear weapons. It will be a complex and subtle effort for Americans to keep their defenses in order and to steer a sane course between impulsiveness and irresolution while they seek to avoid nuclear war and to find ways of assuring the peace of the world.

The success of America's efforts on the international scene will depend in large part on what Americans do at home. Both at home and abroad American democracy must wrestle with other fundamental issues. One is the unprecedented speed and the radical impact of technological change. A second is the preservation and nourishing of individual freedom, originality, and responsibility in the world of large organizations that has come into being. A third is the impact at home of what has come to be known as "the revolution of rising expectations." This revolution is stirring millions of people abroad and creating for their governments tremendous tasks in economic growth, education, and communication. It has begun to make a visible difference within the Soviet Union and its satellites. And it is taking place in the United States as well, where there is an extraordinary pressure not only for material goods but for the qualitative enrichment of individual life through education, music, books, and the significant use of leisure.

These are interests that have traditionally been the special prerogative of the few. The expectation that they can be shared by the many is fundamentally democratic. If it is to be satisfied and if the standards and the sense of excellence of a discriminating civilization are to be preserved, a major effort in education and communication is required, and a thoroughly



reconsidered one. Democracy thrives on the virtues of patience, good humor, and moderation. It will need all these. But it needs excitement too. There is more than enough excitement in the problems it faces to keep American democracy occupied for some time.

Is American democracy capable of dealing with these issues? Is democracy too loose, too slow, too inefficient, to move with the speed, concentration, and daring these problems demand? Can it set definite goals, follow long-range plans, and pull its citizens together for a concerted effort to achieve clearly formulated objectives? Is democracy a dangerous luxury or an historical anachronism for which there is no longer any room? To begin to answer these questions we must stand back and see what we have. So it is to an account and appraisal of the fundamental characteristics of the American democratic process that we now turn.

## II. Consensus in a Democratic Society

American democracy faces the test of an era in which the pace and scope of change are unprecedented. Everywhere, and not least in the United States, habits of thought and patterns of behavior that represent the inheritance of centuries are rapidly losing or have already lost their force. And in many parts of the world, aggressive ideologies have arisen which exercise a wide appeal. Leaning on democratic ideals at some points and subtly distorting them at others, they also challenge the democratic outlook in fundamental ways. If a democratic society is to sail through such storms and arrive successfully at destinations of its own choosing, it must possess inner forces of stability and cohesion on which it can call.

The first question we must therefore consider is the way in which the many groups and interests that compose a democratic society are held together. When a society concert its efforts for the sake of common goals and when it does so without recourse to violence or terror, it counts on the existence of certain generally held beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. Let us begin by asking what kind of agreement a democracy may and must enforce.

### ALLEGIANCE TO THE RULES OF THE GAME

The answer must begin with the recognition that democratic ideals have their origins in a variety of religious and secular traditions and that there is no single embracing philosophy which all citizens of a democracy can be expected to share. Experience shows that men can be equally loyal to democratic ideals even though they give different ultimate

reasons for their loyalty. In the United States, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and free thinkers have all found it possible to agree about the validity of democratic ideals. The practice of toleration that characterizes free societies is the hard-won product of bitter experience. As the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the ideological purges in contemporary totalitarian societies indicate, the effort to impose unity of belief in matters of religion and ultimate philosophy, far from unifying a society, can lead to extraordinary bloodshed and brutality and can breed hostilities which it can take centuries to erase.

Accordingly, there is no official creed—religious, philosophical, or scientific—that a democratic state can impose on its citizens. Each individual is free to try to win his fellows to his own views by every fair means. Truth in matters of religion, philosophy, or science cannot be determined by vote, popular pressure, or governmental fiat. The issues with which these fundamental human enterprises are concerned are too important to be regulated by political expediencies, real or alleged. In a democracy the state is neutral with regard to religion, philosophy, or science, and citizens are free to decide for themselves where they stand in relation to the ultimate questions concerning the nature of the universe and man's place within it. This is one reason why those who are deeply concerned about these matters are likely to prize democracy. Democracy does not ask them to conceal, compromise, or apologize for their views on issues so important that concealment, compromise, and apology are incompatible with honor and conscience. In short, cohesion is achieved in a democratic society in the first instance by carefully removing certain questions from the sphere of politics, by separating the things that are Caesar's from the things that are God's.

But if a democracy does not demand that all its citizens accept a common religion or view of the cosmos, what is the nature of the agreement at which it must aim and which successful democracies have largely achieved? It consists in a shared allegiance to the rules by which social decisions are reached.

In a democratic society it is expected that men will hold different aims and ideas and that these aims and ideas will sometimes clash. If common policies are achieved and enforced in such a society and if citizens accept peaceably the defeat of their hopes in the public arena, the reason is that they believe it better in the long run to yield and fight another day rather than sacrifice the rules by which victory in such a struggle is determined. In a democracy the preservation of those rules normally takes priority over the achievement of any other social purpose. This is the heart of the democratic political ethic, and the allegiance of an individual to this ethic is the acid test of his allegiance to democracy.

Allegiance to the rules of the democratic competition is not pure ritualism. Written into the rules governing the democratic process are principles that provide for orderly change in the rules themselves. Moreover, the rules that define fair democratic competition are of at least two kinds. Some, like the electoral process or the right of freedom of assembly, are set forth in explicit laws. If governmental decisions are made in contravention of rules of this sort, they lack authority and do not carry a mandate that must be obeyed. Other rules of the democratic process, however, are matters not of legal procedure but of ethical principle. They cover matters too subtle and intricate to be spelled out in detail, but they are exemplified by such principles as honesty in stating the facts, a separation of a public official's public duties from his private interests, and refusal to impugn the loyalty of one's opponents in legitimate democratic competition. The success of the democratic process depends to a considerable extent on the degree to which citizens adhere to such unwritten rules. For unwritten moral assumptions affect the way that written rules are applied and the respect that men hold for these rules. If men think the rules of the game are mere rituals without an ethical substance behind them, they will look upon the rules as deceptions or as meaningless frivolities. When a democratic consensus is vigorous, therefore, loyalty to the rules of the game is loyalty to the inner spirit as well as the external forms of democracy.

### FORMATION OF A DEMOCRACY'S WORKING CONSENSUS

A minimal agreement to abide by the rules of the democratic process is not enough, however, to produce effective and resolute government in a democracy. Free discussion will yield no practical results unless men talk directly to each other, unless they address themselves to common problems and share some common assumptions; disagreement and conflicts of interest cannot terminate in agreements that men accept voluntarily unless they find a common ground on which to negotiate. In addition to generally shared allegiance to the rules of the game, democracy also requires a practical working consensus about definite issues.

What is this "working consensus"? In any stable democracy that has the power to get ahead with its business, a body of opinion and principle tends to grow up and to be widely shared. Men are not forced or legislated into such a consensus, and no one in a democracy can be required to accept it. But habit, sentiment, common experience, and the appropriate social conditions all contrive to produce it. And if it does not exist, even common allegiance to the rules of the game is jeopardized.

The working consensus serves to define the issues that must be solved and the effective limits of the political dialogue at any given time. Disagreements, often fundamental ones, arise within it; and citizens who stand outside the prevailing consensus often make precious contributions to democracy precisely because they do so. Nevertheless, when such an informal working agreement exists it serves to define what is and what is not a significant matter for public debate; and in a successful democracy such a consensus usually does exist. Thus, there may be controversy today about the priority that should be given to slum clearance in comparison with other projects, but there is now no debate about whether the elimination of slums falls within the area of the public interest. In short, the decisions that are made in a democracy, the com-

promises that are reached, and the actions that are taken are made in an environing moral and intellectual atmosphere.

#### The Role of Compromise

How is this working consensus achieved? To a large extent it is achieved by compromise, which is the workaday instrument of practical democracy. In the best of worlds men have different interests, and since resources are scarce, no individual, no matter how admirable his purposes, can do everything he pleases. The effort of a democracy is to arrive at arrangements that will convince most men that their interests have been taken at least partly into account. Democracy thus depends on the ability of its citizens to negotiate peacefully with each other, to give as well as receive, and to arrive at understandings to which they will mutually adhere. Such understandings form the point of departure for the next round of the democratic debate.

Far from representing a lapse from principle, compromise thus represents one of democracy's most signal achievements. Compromise is incompatible with an unbending commitment to an abstract ideology; but it does not imply weak wills or fuzzy minds. Groups within a democracy may and do struggle hard for the achievement of their purposes; and if they do not achieve their full program at any given moment, they can continue to struggle until they do. The ethic of compromise does not call for them to abandon the struggle for their ultimate purposes. It calls for them only to carry on their fight at all times within the rules of the democratic process. They will use the courts, the press, peaceful public demonstrations, strikes, and elections; they will not use violence, slander, personal threats, or bribes. A notable example from the past of this sort of resolute struggle was the campaign for legislation against child labor. A current example, remarkable for its courage, restraint, and respect for democratic procedures, is the campaign American Negroes are waging for full citizenship.

#### Focusing the Public Interest

The striking of bargains between different interest groups is only part of what is involved, however, in the formation of

an enlightened democratic consensus. Contemporary American society is a complex social order composed of many different groups with conflicting interests. But it is also an intricately coordinated society in which the actions of any group can ramify outward, affecting the welfare of great numbers of people and perhaps the security of the democratic process as a whole. When strong-minded groups take decisions, or when they struggle with other groups, the pressure on them to behave responsibly cannot come only from within the groups themselves. It must also come from the outside. Something we know as the public interest must be focused, expressed, and brought to bear on the contending parties.

To give the conception of the public interest specific content and to make it come alive in the day-to-day affairs of a democracy is the task of many agencies. The press, the churches, the universities, civic groups, eminent individuals, political parties, all play a part. They will often have different views about the true nature of the public interest, and none of them, in a democracy, will occupy a position as a privileged interpreter and spokesman for the common good. But there is one agency that has an unequivocal responsibility to protect the public interest and a special opportunity to make it come alive in a democracy's day-to-day existence. This is government—at all levels. Government cannot claim greater intellectual authority for its judgments than other institutions in democratic society. Within a constitutional framework, however, it has ultimate legal authority, and it has the greatest power to voice the public interest forcefully and to see that it is protected. A democratic government's task includes much more than appeasing and conciliating different groups. It includes the duty to remind citizens of the larger frame of reference within which they act and to embody and enforce the common purposes to which they must contribute.

In any society there are certain common interests which men must seek together because they cannot seek them separately. The concept of the public interest stands first and foremost for such common interests. At the most elementary level, these include certain common necessities such as a sound cur-

rency, protected natural resources, roads, schools, police, sanitation facilities, and instruments of communication. But at a higher level they include values and purposes to which a society, by tradition or by its deliberate decision, is committed. In a democratic society the preservation of the fundamental rights of the individual and of the democratic decision-making process is itself a supreme part of the public interest.

Among the more important matters that today fall within the range of the American public interest so defined is an economy that combines stability of the general price level and a low rate of unemployment with a high rate of growth of production; an adequate system of national defense; a well-conceived and supported foreign policy aimed at preserving the freedom of the American people and at using the power of the United States to work for a peaceful and productive international order; a vigorous program of research in the physical, biological, medical, and social sciences; the orderly renovation of our metropolitan areas; an educational system that draws out the potential excellences of each individual, while at the same time cultivating in the young the habits of democracy and producing the trained intelligence, general and specialized, on which a twentieth-century democracy must depend.

As this imposing but incomplete list suggests, the agenda of activities that must be matters of organized and official public concern at any particular moment is not inscribed for all eternity. Nor is it an agenda which is self-evident. The determination of what lies within the public interest is probably the fundamental task which each successive democratic government must undertake. Its achievement in conciliating and adjusting the opposing interests within a democracy is not complete unless government itself affirmatively represents the overriding public good that must also be taken into account. For a democratic government does not exist simply to please as many groups as possible. It is the trustee of fundamental and common concerns which can otherwise be smothered in the conflict between special interests.

Moreover, there is a second meaning of "the public in-



terest" with which a democratic government must also be concerned. The classic image of "John Q. Public" waiting outside the door while the men inside the smoke-filled room are plotting or quarreling catches this meaning exactly, although a little melodramatically. At times the idea of the public interest stands for interests that are likely to be forgotten, interests that are indirectly affected by an issue although not directly involved in it. To speak of a "public interest" in such contexts is to call attention to values that may be overlooked, to people who may be neglected, to damage that may be done because men are acting within too narrow a conception of their responsibilities.

While a democratic government is not the only agency that exists to bring such neglected interests to the fore, it is one of the principal instruments for doing so. It exists not only to represent interests that have already found themselves but to give a voice and shape to interests which without it would be silent and unformed. Government in a democracy, if it is good government, is more than a broker for those who have the power to bring their interests and opinions to its attention. It is a watchman against injustice and irresponsibility, and a representative of those who need the helping power of government if their interests are to see the light of day.

#### CONTINUING RECONSTRUCTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CONSENSUS

The political leader cannot, by himself, create a conception of the public interest. He helps form, but he also leans on, the working democratic consensus. And the formation—or destruction—of this consensus is not an organized process. It goes on whether anyone wills it or not. Events take place and men respond to them, changing their beliefs about the kind of world in which they live and altering the judgments they pass on that world.

A little more than a century ago, for example, reports by Parliamentary commissions revealing conditions in British

mines and factories provoked a revulsion of conscience in Great Britain that affected people in all classes and that fundamentally changed the context of political discussion and action. Thirty years ago, similarly, Americans clashed in their interpretation of unemployment. Some took it to be a sign of individual failure, others of an iron economic law. An overwhelming majority now believes that unemployment is a social ill which can and should be substantially moderated by government action.

In the long run few things are more important in the politics of a nation than such changes in the terms of debate and in the subjects around which discussion turns. This is why the mere presence of a consensus is not enough. Agreement about the wrong things can be immensely damaging. Nor does it suffice for a democracy merely to give answers to the questions it asks itself. It is important that it asks the right questions in the right terms and avoid wrestling with the ghosts of problems of a preceding era. While the preservation of the conditions that make for consensus must be the constant object of a democracy, it is not the preservation of the existing consensus in all its parts but rather the steady criticism of that consensus that should concern such a society.

In the end, a task that is indispensable to the politics of democracy is carried on outside the political arena. Scholars who conduct deliberate and detached inquiry into the facts, critics who attack encrusted habits of thought, moralists who glimpse new values of which their contemporaries ought to be aware, these and others contribute decisively to the course of democratic politics. Much that such men do may be misguided and wasted, and such success as their ideas achieve is usually achieved slowly. But the health of a democracy depends on its ability to sustain and respect those who disengage themselves from the currents of prevailing opinion. A democracy cannot stand a consensus from which there is no dissent.

Nor should the consensus that prevails be one that invites only apathetic assent. It is possible for a society to deal with its problems efficiently, to satisfy the private and practical interests of most of its members, and still to leave them un-

moved and uneasy. Most men also desire something more from the societies they inhabit. They want a sense that large projects are under way and that they are part of some significant and enduring human enterprise. If their society does not give them such a sense, it is possible for them to be physically contented and yet morally indifferent or alienated. Totalitarian ideologies have exploited this demand, but they are not the best means by which this demand can be satisfied. A society that is moved by an image of what it can be and that translates this image into definite programs of action can also satisfy the human impulse to idealism.

### III. Social Conditions of a Democratic Consensus

In the democracies that are functioning most successfully, there is both a remarkable degree of allegiance to the rules of the democratic game and a large measure of consensus about the important issues to which the political dialogue should be addressed. This is what makes these democracies successful. Yet this is not a state of affairs that comes merely for the asking. It is the product of appropriate social conditions, sometimes happily inherited and sometimes deliberately created. To regard the conditions that make for consensus as inherently precarious and to tend them with the greatest deliberate care should be the working principle of any democracy.

#### HABIT AND TRAINING

The primary conditions that affect an individual's allegiance to rules of conduct of any kind are obviously his habituation and training. The greatest part of human behavior is determined not by conscious decisions or articulate ideas but by habits and attitudes that usually lie below the level of awareness. The home and the school, accordingly, are among the primary agencies by which democratic patterns of behavior can be fostered and consolidated or, conversely, discouraged and weakened. The neighborhood, the church, the civic group, and the general tone of informal community relationships are hardly less important. And it is what the child actually finds in such contexts, it should be added, as well as the explicit moral teaching he receives, that is likely to exercise an influence upon him. For habits and values, generally speaking, are caught,

not taught. They develop by imitation, emulation, and the force of example.

They also need regular exercise. If faithfulness to the rules of the democratic process is in large part a matter of habit and training, the individual must have reasonably frequent opportunities to practice such rules actively and to practice them successfully. When the rules of democratic procedure are remote from the everyday experience of the ordinary citizen, when he does not respond to a breach of those rules with an instinctive aversion, a democratic consensus has lost some of its spontaneity and vigor.

In addition to the immediate, practical work that they do, therefore, the myriad voluntary organizations that exist at the local level in the United States perform a more general function. They are training grounds for democratic habits. The consequences for a democracy are considerable if such organizations lose their power, if their democratic procedures break down, or if such procedures regularly yield disappointing results. It is a matter for concern, therefore, when voluntary organizations become impersonal, when membership in them is passive, or when, as studies indicate, large numbers of citizens, either through lack of interest or of opportunity, are not members of any formally organized voluntary associations. For the habits and attitudes on which the democratic process depends are plainly affected by the circumstances which the citizens of a democracy meet in their everyday lives.

#### FORCE OF EXAMPLE

The citizen's allegiance to the rules of his society also depends on general conditions in the society at large. A society's public ceremonies symbolize the principles on which it professes to stand; its games dramatize the social as well as physical traits it admires; its religions evoke its ideals. Stories about ancestors, heroic and venerated figures, great experiences that men share together, all give them the sense that they are part of an ongoing enterprise and that they owe it their allegiance.

And the past by itself has a momentum that propels men's actions into molds which, for better or worse, they often find it uncomfortable or agonizing to break.

Not least among these influences on the individual's feeling of allegiance to the basic rules of his society is the behavior of certain key individuals and institutions. In any society, some persons and certain institutions acquire symbolic functions. They come to be examples of a society's dominant aspirations. The actual character of such persons and institutions is bound to affect the regard which ordinary men hold for the rules of their society. The respect that the major institutions in our society show for democratic principles of behavior is thus a matter of great importance.

A refusal to include a particular racial group within the activities of such organizations, for instance, does more than penalize this group unjustly. Those who are not directly affected are invited to be skeptical about the workability of democratic principles and the genuineness of our society's commitment to these principles. Similarly, the use of symbols of democracy and patriotism to sell a product or to win a momentary political advantage helps to cheapen the currency of these symbols. Not least, when elected leaders, political parties, or the media of communication hesitate to give difficult and controversial issues the extended and frank discussion they deserve, the democratic dialogue is robbed of its seriousness and the respect in which it is generally held is likely to be weakened. For the kind of respect for the rules which is essential in a democracy depends peculiarly on the kind of respect which is shown toward those rules by its most representative institutions. Any sharp contrast between rhetoric and reality, between the ideals such institutions profess and their actual behavior, endangers the credit rating that democratic principles enjoy in the public mind.

Force of habit and force of example are both ingredients, then, of the process that produces general allegiance to the rules of the democratic competition. There are other conditions, however, that must also be satisfied. And one of the most important is that men and women feel that the rules to which they are asked to conform are good rules. Among other things

this means that they must feel that these rules generally protect and advance their vital interests and the values, selfish or unselfish, to which they devote their lives. Of course, a democratic society cannot undertake to advance the values, say, of criminals. But in order to maintain general respect for the rules by which it lives, a democratic society must achieve a reasonable measure of success in satisfying the individual interests of its law-abiding citizens. What are the conditions on which this depends?

### CIVIL LIBERTIES

A democratic society has an enormous source of strength in its commitment to civil liberty. For there are two fundamental conditions that must be met if individuals are to retain their respect for democratic principles of behavior. The first is that they shall not be required to sacrifice what they cannot sacrifice and keep their self-respect. The second is that they shall believe that there are avenues of legitimate action available to them through which they can register their complaints and struggle to improve their condition. Without the presence of civil liberties, no social order can claim to be a democracy in the sense of the term that is habitual in the Western world.

The first function of these liberties is to allow the individual citizen to remain true to the values he cherishes most. A democracy must of course set limits to the individual's right to carry his beliefs and values into action. But if it adheres to its commitment to civil liberty, in spirit as well as in form, it does not require the citizen to conceal or deny his beliefs and values. Moreover, a democracy also permits him to do something about them. Within very broad limits the citizen is free to speak, to publish, to raise his children according to his own lights, to worship or not to worship, to travel, and to associate with those he chooses. And so he is able not simply to enjoy his privacy without interference but to give his inner beliefs and feelings at least some external form.

The role of civil liberties in protecting the individual,

however, is generally recognized. What is not so fully understood is their role in making the achievement of a democratic consensus easier. A defining characteristic of democratic government is that it maintains a "loyal opposition" and takes elaborate steps to protect and preserve organized disagreement with its program. Far from encouraging social instability, this encourages social cohesion. For it makes dissent a legitimate part of the system. To those who have reason to be dissatisfied with their lot in life, civil liberties can be at once symbols and instruments of hope. They permit and encourage the growth of visible agencies--newspapers and journals, unions and political parties, civic associations and private enterprises--by which those who have grievances and discontents can push for the correction of what disturbs them. Thus, by offering its citizens instruments for changing a social system that are themselves parts of that system, a democracy can convert even dissatisfaction into a reason for allegiance to democracy as a whole.

#### DISTRIBUTION OF POWER AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE COMMUNITY

Yet the existence of civil liberties is generally not enough to ensure an individual's allegiance to democratic principles. Without the proper social structure, civil liberties can seem empty abstractions, inviting the comment, like Anatole France's that they forbid the rich and the poor alike to beg in the streets and sleep under bridges. A full-fledged desire to give meaning to civil liberties calls for continuing concern, not only with legal safeguards, but with the economic and social conditions that can make those liberties instruments that ordinary citizens actually prize and use.

Ideas first arise in the minds of individuals, and the record of democracy is replete with examples of individuals who have started out alone, who have fought courageously for an idea, and who have ultimately won through to victory. But this has meant that such individuals have eventually been able



to find others who shared their purposes and have had ways of communicating with them. To achieve social purposes, groups must normally be formed. They may consist of obscure or eminent people, rich ones or poor, or of all manner and variety of men and women. But if they are to wage an effective struggle they must find effective leadership and have or develop economic or social leverage. Their power to do so does not depend simply on legal guarantees of civil liberty, but on the means to make these rights effective through access to the necessary resources of talent, wealth, and influence in the community, and a democratic society has the obligation to see to it that all citizens have access to these practical tools of struggle.

This is why, for over a century, a recurrent issue has pre-occupied democracy in all countries. It is the tension between those who already enjoy the full rights and powers of democratic citizenship and those to whom these rights and powers have not yet been extended. Where this issue has been solved, and solved without leaving a heritage of distrust and resentment behind it, democracy has been highly stable. Where it has not been solved, or solved slowly and bitterly, democracy has been unstable. The speed and good grace with which a democratic society admits groups that have hitherto been excluded from full membership is a major determinant of its subsequent health and cohesiveness.

Such an issue, of course, is not one that can be settled once and for all. In every generation new groups are likely to arise that knock at the door of democratic society and demand admission. The Jacksonian era is one such episode in American history. The struggle of industrial workers for recognition of the legitimacy of their major instrument of social power, the labor union, is another episode and one that has marked the history of all modern democracies. The contemporary struggle of American Negroes for equal civil rights and educational opportunity is the present chapter of this story in the United States. New economic or political conditions may at some future date lead other groups to believe they are excluded from the rights and powers that go with full membership in the democratic community, that they are in democratic society but

not of it. Whatever groups these may be, the success of democratic government will depend in the future, as it has in the past, on its responsiveness to them and its willingness to make a place for them in the democratic process.

As these examples suggest, there are potent dangers to the democratic process in the existence of sharp and rigid divisions between social classes or between religious, ethnic, or racial groups. The compromises on which a democratic society rests are possible when it contains citizens whose interests overlap at many points and who do not believe that their entire destiny in life depends on the solution of some one all-embracing issue. Rigid distinctions of class and caste, in contrast, create resentments around which all other issues cluster and divide a society into large and mutually exclusive groups whose experience is different and whose outlooks may be wholly opposed.

#### ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF EFFECTIVE DEMOCRACY

Equally important is the maintenance of an economy that leaves most of its members with the conviction that they or their children have a chance to move upward and that status in their society is something achieved, not inherited. "Equality of opportunity" is, therefore, one of the most important things that democracy means when translated into economic and social terms. Political democracy gives citizens a say about public affairs. It is buttressed by an economic system which gives citizens a share in the well-being of their society. The success of American democracy in building a voluntary consensus based on competition and compromise is to a large extent the result of the fact that we have been a prosperous society that has given its members economic elbowroom.

A democratic society must therefore be committed, for practical as well as moral reasons, to a struggle against poverty. The ethic of compromise and the mutual understanding on which democratic political processes rest require citizens who do not feel that their backs are against the wall, and who do

possess a broad spectrum of interests and associations. Poverty is incompatible with this state of affairs. Moreover, the economy of a democracy must be relatively free from major shocks like widespread unemployment or uncontrolled inflation, which upset established expectations concerning the justice of social arrangements. Such events touch individuals along the whole range of their interests, leave profound and lasting psychological shocks, and destroy the conditions of compromise by creating pervasive divisions and hostilities. The preservation of a democratic society requires positive and deliberate action to protect the economy against such catastrophes.

The history of the last thirty years, however, has focused the attention of most citizens on such dangers. With regard to economic issues, a practical working consensus has been reached in the United States. Government, it is agreed, has an obligation to prevent violent changes in over-all price levels and to pursue policies aiming to maintain the economy at or near the level of full employment. Important disagreements exist with regard to these matters; but they have to do with ways, means, and priorities, and not with fundamental objectives.

### A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

The consideration of these issues leads us to a concluding topic—the general shape of the social order that makes democratic political processes vigorous and successful. A society with a thoroughly democratic social order will be a “pluralistic society.” Such a society is the opposite of a totalitarian or monolithic society. It contains and protects many religions, many philosophies, many ethnic groups, many different people trying different ideas in different ways. It is marked by the wide dispersion of power throughout its various sections and by the existence of autonomous centers of decision-making authority. It offers individuals a chance to vote for more than one party, to choose among municipal or state governments that have different patterns, to change their jobs freely, and to join—or to refuse to join—many different groups.

In a pluralistic society, such groups have distinctive characteristics. They are independent of one another, autonomous and self-supporting, and are strong enough to resist pressure from the outside and to maintain their integrity when the struggle is severe. Moreover, on the contemporary scene, these groups are usually specialized groups—a farmers' cooperative, a professional association, a chamber of commerce—which do not represent all the manifold interests of the individuals who belong to them. They represent only a limited and selected set of these interests. The great boon conferred on its members by a society organized in this way is that it releases them from total dependence on any single human organization. They do not have to accept the unlimited authority of any group of men; they can turn from one organization to another for protection; they can spread their interests so that few defeats need to be final disasters.

But a pluralistic society provides more than freedom. It provides conditions in which the habit of compromise has a chance to develop and opportunities for reasonable and rewarding compromises are likely to flourish. In such a society the citizen has many different interests and associations; no center of power and interest embraces all the others; no single issue becomes so dominant that all other issues pile up around it. When an individual has many interests and belongs to many groups, he is unlikely to risk everything on a single issue, and he is likely to bring an external perspective to the struggles in which he engages. Some of his interests may overlap those of men and women who are among the innocent bystanders. Some even may be identical with those of members of the group directly opposed to his own. Wittingly or unwittingly, in consequence, he is likely to see things a little from the outside and to rehearse the larger social issue in an inner debate in his own mind.

Thus, conflicts in a pluralistic society are likely to be milder than those that arise in societies in which the individual is wholly encased within the group to which he belongs. Specific clashes of interest are limited, and they occur within a network of intersecting loyalties. One of the most important

reasons why compromise has been an effective instrument of American democracy is that American society has been pluralistic.

On the rapidly changing contemporary scene, attention must be steadily focused on the conditions on which a pluralistic society depends. Relatively few individuals in any modern society can accomplish their purposes without the protection and support of powerful social groups. Accordingly, a democratic society must meet two imperatives. It must see to it that all its citizens have the opportunity to join groups that can protect and represent them; at the same time, however, it must see to it that none of these groups exercises monopolistic power over the individual.

In the contemporary world, the totalitarian state and monolithic political parties have been the most vivid examples of this danger. But the danger is present even in the absence of overt totalitarian commitments. As the social democratic parties of Western Europe seem now to agree, the state cannot be the only employer in the community; its power over the individual must be checked by the existence of other possible employers. Similarly, the individual must be protected against private employers by his union and by the state, and his rights must also be protected within his union by the action of the state or by other appropriate means.

The objective of a pluralistic society is to give the individual a wide variety of real and interesting alternatives among which he can choose. When men speak of a free society this is primarily what they mean.

## IV. The Consent of the Governed

A democratic society has stability and ballast when its citizens adhere to its fundamental rules. It has a place to begin its political dialogue when most of its citizens are in agreement about the character of the issues that must be met. But rules to follow and a place to start are not enough to produce programs and set goals. Decisions must be made and translated into action. The process by which this is done is the process of government.

We must turn, therefore, to an examination of a fundamental idea. That governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed," that here on this continent the effort has been made to establish "government of the people, by the people, for the people"—these classic phrases express the heart of the American political creed. Since this creed was formulated the United States has become a large, complex, and specialized industrial society, but the idea of government by consent of the governed continues to be valid. Yet there are few ideas which require more careful and candid scrutiny by the citizens of democracy.

Equipped with ill-considered notions of what is meant by "the consent of the governed," many American citizens have an improper conception of their rights and responsibilities and their powers and privileges under a democratic government. Armed with equally inaccurate notions, many critics of democracy have argued that it proposes a system of government that cannot be achieved or that would fail disastrously if it were achieved.

There have been two classic and influential interpretations of this idea of consent of the governed. The first is that a society is democratic when its members participate directly in making its decisions. The second is that a society is democratic

when it elects its representatives by majority vote and when the majority of the elected representatives exercises the authority for determining a course of public policy. The first of these interpretations may be called the "town-meeting" ideal of democracy, and the second, the "representative government" ideal.

#### GOVERNMENT BY TOWN MEETING

From the time of the Greeks, the idea of government by citizens who meet face to face to discuss their problems has been a fundamental impulse behind many of the most influential theories of democracy. The town meetings of the New England colonists exemplified this idea in the New World. One great theme in the history of contemporary democracy, it may be said, has been the attempt to adapt an ideal of government developed in an atmosphere of intimate community life to an era of great nation-states, large and centralized organization, and highly specialized knowledge.

Such an ideal is by no means entirely inapplicable to a modern industrial society. In thousands of American communities, effective power in determining zoning ordinances, school budgets, and other local issues still lies in the institution of the town meeting. When the group concerned is relatively small, face-to-face consultation continues to be an important part of the democratic process of self-government. But it is plain that no city, state, or national government can conduct its business by direct consultation with all citizens or by submitting all major issues to popular referendum. It must make decisions on its own, and frequently they are difficult technical decisions whose details the great proportion of citizens cannot be expected to grasp.

These facts, of course, are generally understood and accepted in the United States and in other large nations. Yet underneath the apparent acceptance of these facts, the ideal of the town meeting still persists. Men unconsciously use it in evaluating the institutions of contemporary democratic government. Thus, there is still widespread suspicion of the "expert"

and the "bureaucrat" in government, not because they are thought to know less than they claim or to be more officious than they should be, but because it is felt they do not belong in a truly democratic government. Such government, it is erroneously supposed, should be direct government by the people. For the same reason the professional politician is sometimes regarded as an undesirable appendage of democracy rather than an essential feature. Such views rest upon a definition of democracy that is not only irrelevant to contemporary conditions but describes democracy as it has hardly ever existed.

The lingering and unobserved influence of the town-meeting ideal of democracy is responsible for other kinds of misdirected thought and behavior as well. For example, it stands behind claims that democracy does not "really" exist because military or diplomatic decisions are regularly made without substantial popular participation beforehand—even though these decisions are made by those who have the constitutional responsibility to do so. It also stands behind practices that are parodies of democratic processes. The mass meetings which were standard weapons of Fascism are one example. Another is the direct appeal which demagogues in many democratic countries have regularly made to "the people" when they have wished to justify a violation of normal democratic procedures. There are other examples, although relatively harmless ones, in practices that are frequently praised in free societies as instances of "democracy in action." The annual meetings of stockholders in large corporations are a case in point. Such meetings have both symbolic and practical uses but the decision-making power normally remains in the hands of management.

There are aspirations behind the town-meeting conception of democracy, however, which must be recognized as indelible parts of the democratic creed. The town-meeting conception of democracy is an idealized way of expressing the democratic hope that those who are governed will be able to reach those who govern them, that they will be able to make their voices heard where it counts and will be recognized as persons and not as faceless cogs in an efficient machine. It speaks for the belief that a society is safer and freer when the



bulk of its citizens understand the programs and goals that their government has chosen and when they have achieved this understanding because these programs and goals have been honestly debated in public.

Not least, the town-meeting ideal catches an important meaning of freedom and expresses a classic conviction of believers in democracy. The ordinary man may or may not be the best judge of his own interests, but if he does not exercise effective authority over matters that are in his immediate range of interest and competence, he may be a well-tended animal, but he will not be a free man. Freedom in the concrete, freedom as it is experienced in daily life, is the experience of having a hand in the determining of issues that touch the individual closely and intimately.

There is a dignity in democracy based on individuals working together seeking solutions for their joint problems. Since the time of the Greeks it has been part of the democratic outlook that this kind of dignity is the reward of a free way of life and that the chance to participate as an equal in communal ventures is one of the ways in which men educate themselves best and one of the major joys of being alive. It is because democracy has been thought to make such an opportunity more generally available that it has been prized by most of its adherents.

Despite its limitations the town-meeting conception of democracy is therefore useful as a warning against making wholesale judgments about the much mooted issue of "centralization" or "decentralization." The movement toward highly centralized government at the national level has been a natural and a necessary response of American democracy to the problems faced by the American people at home and abroad. Military defense, foreign policy, or the control of the business cycle are all matters that cut across inherited state and local lines and that require decisive action at the center of things. It should be noted that this tendency has been given added impetus because states and communities have frequently shirked their own direct responsibilities.

But such big questions, although they are questions of na-

tional significance, are not necessarily the questions that make the most important difference in the quality of the ordinary citizen's daily life. He spends this life at work, in a neighborhood, and inside his home. If he is not directly consulted face to face each time that national decisions are made, he will not necessarily feel that his democratic rights have been violated. But if he feels that he has no voice in the control of the immediate forces that affect his home, the character of his neighborhood, or the conditions under which he works, he is likely to have just this feeling. In the day of the automatic calculator, therefore, a degree of local variety and autonomy may well be a price worth paying—even if, as is by no means certain, it means a sacrifice in organizational efficiency. Paternalism is the uninvited guest at most banquets in honor of efficiency.

### REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

There is another classic view of political democracy, however, which is even more influential than the view that democracy is government by town meeting. This is the belief that democracy means government by representatives who are chosen by vote. In the traditional interpretation of this doctrine, it is held that these representatives will do the people's work for them, expressing and implementing the desires of the majority. Probably no idea of the nature and rationale of political democracy is more widespread. It is one element in the conception of the United States as a constitutional republic, and it conforms to the formal mechanisms of existing democratic governments.

An unquestionable hallmark of genuine democracy is the individual citizen's right to vote in free elections for his representatives in government, to choose them from among competing groups, and to do so without fear of penalty. The concept of free elections thus implies a good deal more about the meaning of democracy than the existence of elections alone. It implies that legal means of criticizing a government's policies must exist, that there must be freedom of thought, speech, and

association, that the opposition to a government must have a chance to be organized, and that the electoral majority must respect the rights of the minority. The classic definition of "representative government" as government by men chosen in free elections is thus an accurate and suggestive definition of democracy.

Nevertheless, this conception of democracy can also be misleading unless it is analyzed. The idea of majority rule through a representative assembly rests on two concepts. The first is the concept of "majority rule." The second is the concept of "representation."

#### The Concept of "Majority Rule"

The most usual interpretation of the idea of "majority rule" is that it refers to the election of governments by majority vote. It has happened that presidents have been elected in the United States by pluralities rather than majorities, and even that individuals have been elected who have won a smaller popular vote than the defeated candidate. Despite these exceptions, the election of governments by majority vote is obviously the norm in the United States, and a significant determinant of government policy. Through elections, citizens have the opportunity to pass judgment on the performance of their government and to determine some of the major lines of policy of the next government. The existence of elections is a major reason why democratic governments are under steady pressure to be responsive to the opinions of ordinary citizens.

But while elections influence the policies of government, they are not the only determinants of these policies. These policies are forged in the teeth of events, amidst the day-to-day pressures of different groups, and with the advice of administrative officers who have not themselves been elected. They are explained and propelled by political parties, and tested and changed in the competition that goes on within and between these parties. When the actual processes by which democratic governments make decisions are examined, "majority rule" stands for something much more complicated than the choosing of a government by free election. It stands for the forma-

tion of policies in a context of continuing public discussion and debate. Above all, it stands for a decision-making process that is not dominated by a single minority group or oligarchy.

Indeed, the phrase "majority rule" has a certain inexactness about it when the most important feature of the democratic decision-making process is taken into account. At the heart of this process is the competition among the organized interest groups in the community. All these groups speak for minorities. When we speak of "majority rule," we largely mean that most of the important organized groups in the community are able to make themselves heard at some point in the elaborate process by which government decisions in America are made. The ideal of majority rule expresses the democratic antipathy to the domination of society by any single center of power. It speaks for the democratic effort to achieve government that will serve the interests of a steadily larger portion of a nation and that will do so because all its citizens possess instruments for affecting its decisions.

The politics of democracy, therefore, is primarily the politics of what are known as pressure groups. The existence of such groups is frequently taken, even by the strongest partisans of democracy, as a sign of democratic weakness. It is an error to do so; the statement does not imply that democratic politics are inherently dishonest or that behind the facade of "majority rule" and "government by consent" sinister interests dominate the American system of government. On the contrary, such conclusions are drawn only when a simplistic conception of democratic processes of government is accepted. Pressure groups, for example, have fought against minimum wage laws; but other pressure groups have fought for them. The groups that make their weight felt in the democratic process are sometimes self-seeking, sometimes public-spirited. Some democratic political figures think only of the next election; others try to determine their position on the basis of a conscientious and independent examination of the issues. But the politics of pressure groups is not in itself incompatible with democracy. The only alternative to this kind of politics is a government that rules over isolated and rootless individuals

who have no groups other than the government to protect them and no stable and independent social power of their own. This is the pattern at which totalitarian government aims.

#### The Idea of "Representation"

The idea of majority rule is intimately tied to another central idea in the theory of democratic government—the idea that such government is "representative." This has sometimes been interpreted to mean that those who are elected to political office are merely the agents of the electorate and exist simply to translate into action such views as the electorate holds. As a result of this notion, grave doubts are sometimes expressed about the viability of democracy. It is argued that not many citizens vote unselfishly, that most of them vote impulsively or irrationally, and that few or no citizens have the knowledge that is a necessary prerequisite to warranted judgments about public issues. Democracy, it is therefore suggested, is based on a false view of human capacities and on oversimplified notions about the nature of the problems with which a modern government must grapple.

These skeptical doubts are better directed at faulty assumptions—conceptions of representative government to which no contemporary representative government in fact conforms—rather than at the actual way in which democratic government operates.

There is a fundamental error in the notion that a democratic government can be, or should be, merely the passive spokesman of the popular will. It lies in assuming that a definite popular will actually exists in the absence of government, political parties, media of communication, and all the other agencies in society that register what is known as "public opinion." For these agencies do not simply reflect such opinion. They form and inform it and give it its direction and mode of expression.

No one forms his opinions in a void. The citizen must get his information somewhere. He will attach more weight to the views of some people than to the views of others; certain groups in his environment, as a result of their proximity or

their power, will inevitably have a better chance than others to get his ear. Indeed, such political preferences as the individual may express will be preferences with regard to issues that have been formulated expressly for him. Not only do the political parties propose the candidates among whom he must choose, but they define the questions about which the individual citizen is asked to make up his mind. Together with the media of communication and voluntary associations, they bear the crucial responsibility for determining whether the political dialogue will be serious or merely superficial, informed or studiously ignorant.

This is why such groups, and particularly their leaders, may be justly accused of attempting to shift their responsibility when they claim that they are merely giving the American citizen what he wants. What the citizen wants can only be determined by observing how he chooses among the alternatives that are presented to him; if other alternatives were presented, his choices might possibly be different. This principle applies, indeed, to much more than politics. The television, radio, newspaper, housing, or automobile industries do not simply react passively to public demand. They shape and limit that demand and, for better or worse, are therefore among the makers of the so-called "popular will."

This is not an abuse of the democratic process. It is an inevitable concomitant of the process by which opinions and tastes are formed in any society. Undoubtedly, there is justified concern today about the manipulation of opinion and the engineering of consent. Despite the fact that a modern educated population develops some powers of resistance to calculated attempts to deceive it, such attempts remain assaults on the spirit and ethic of democracy. The individual citizens of a free society should have a chance to understand what they are choosing and a chance to impose their own standards after genuinely critical reflection upon them. But this does not eliminate the role of leadership or the responsibility of leaders for the decisions which they and not others make. Unless the political parties, the media of communication, and the leaders of voluntary organizations perform the function of directing the

democratic debate, it will be aimless and unformed. It is their responsibility to put before the citizens a rationally considered and imaginative set of alternatives among which he can make his choice. For the importance of the right to vote is directly proportional to the importance of the issues that are determined by the vote.

The view that a definite popular will can exist without the help of leadership ignores the fact that there is a difference between having an opinion on matters that are immediate and close at hand and having an opinion on matters of government policy. A housewife, for example, in the course of her daily experience and as the keeper of the household budget, is likely to develop her own views about the honesty of the corner grocer. They probably will be rather sensible views, and they will not depend entirely on the testimony of others. But when she moves to the question whether the United States has adequate deterrent strength in intercontinental missiles, she will merely be arrogant if she believes that she can come to a responsible judgment without time and study that may not be hers to give. Moreover, government secrecy about such matters—which may or may not be necessary—may prevent her from obtaining the essential facts she must have if her opinion is to be an informed one.

Many issues, of course, lie in between the areas in which the ordinary citizen has a practical competence and those in which he is almost wholly ignorant. Responsible and intelligent citizenship in a modern democracy nevertheless entails a willingness on the part of citizens to recognize that there will be areas in which they inevitably will be ignorant. The statement "I do not know" is too frequently taken to be a confession that an individual has failed in the performance of his democratic duty. It is an unreasonably undervalued remark. For in many circumstances it reflects intellectual probity and civic good sense.

A more balanced position would acknowledge that there are matters on which an individual citizen is quite competent to make informed judgments, matters on which even modest study and reflection will greatly improve his understanding, and

other matters on which it will be impossible for him to have really informed judgments of his own.

In short, the concept of representative government makes sense only if the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed is properly understood. Democracy is not a system in which the citizenry governs through representatives who are its passive agents. It is a system in which the authority to govern is acquired through competition for the citizens' votes. Those who hold elective position in a democracy are the representatives of the people in the sense that it is the people who choose them and remove them. They are the representatives of a popular will in the sense that it is their obligation to make the decisions they do only after extended consultation with individuals and groups outside government. But it is the function of the electorate to choose and remove a government; it is the function of the government to govern. It makes decisions and does not merely enact decisions already made by the population. Few things can harm the cause of effective democratic government more than a faulty view of the role and responsibility of leadership.

Effective democratic government depends on social and educational conditions that produce good leadership and that give this leadership a chance to function. The political life of a democracy must be such that it does not suffer in comparison with other areas of activity and attracts its fair quota of gifted and responsible people. Such people must not only respect the political life but feel a duty to take an active part in it. The electorate, although it cannot be informed on every issue that confronts government, must be sufficiently informed to understand the main drift of the issues and sufficiently shrewd to detect ability and to tell the charlatan from the genuine article among the candidates that are proposed to it. And although the driving purpose of those who engage in democratic politics, inevitably, is to beat the opposing party, a sufficient number of those who are active in politics, and especially the most powerful among them, must recognize that government has other business as well. Of course, no administration in power in a democracy will be indifferent to the outcome of the next elec-



tion. But the capacity of democratic government in the United States to meet their responsibilities in the era that is taking shape depends on their capacity to think beyond elections as well.

#### INSTRUMENTS OF DEMOCRATIC SELF-CONTROL

No democracy can sustain itself if either its government or its citizens lack the capacity for self-restraint or the habit of looking upon the "majority opinion" of the moment as something that may well be wrong. Happily, democratic institutions give both government and citizens a number of instruments that reinforce and implement these attitudes. At many points the idea of government by majority rule is hedged and qualified by other institutions and practices.

##### Political Parties

One of the most notable of these instruments is the party system. Political parties are normally regarded as the major instruments of democratic rivalry, and it is obvious that this is a major purpose for their existence. In the United States and in many other democracies, however, they also serve a complementary function. Each party is an instrument by which differences are ironed out, tensions reduced, and interests of extraordinary complexity and diversity are brought together. It is within and not only between the two great political parties in the United States that a major part of the struggle between competing interests has taken place, and has been softened and negotiated. In this way, the parties, by means of the political processes that go on within them, contribute to the construction of a democratic consensus as well as to the maintenance of democratic competition.

It is as vehicles of competition that political parties perform their distinctive democratic function. Not all systems of party competition function like the American system, and whatever the special advantages of a two-party system may be, such a system cannot be said to be a necessary characteristic of political democracy. What is a defining characteristic of political

democracy, however, is the existence, legally and openly, of an organized party or parties which are in opposition to the party in power. This is a major instrument of democratic self-control. The subtle notion of a loyal opposition takes us to the center of the democratic process of government. In the large perspective, the opposition party is really part of the government. Its presence means that a democratic government is forced to seek as broad and tolerable a synthesis of interests as possible, and that the minority will be represented to some degree in the policies such a government eventually adopts.

#### Judicial Review

The competition between political parties, however, is not the only instrument of democratic self-control in the United States. The prescriptions of the Constitution and the entire legal framework in which the Constitution is embedded not only set limits to the powers of elected officials but also establish a system of checks and balances. Within this system, which distributes power between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, appeal to the courts, and particularly to the Supreme Court, has been a traditionally effective instrument for preventing the "majority will" from having its way. Moreover, the courts have not only acted as negative and restraining influences. Many of the most fundamental arrangements that govern the relations of American citizens to one another have been created not by explicit legislation but by judicial action.

Politics, in a democracy and in any society, is constantly in danger of passing under the rule of the urgent moment and the immediately expedient. Judicial review is one of American democratic society's instruments for checking this tendency. For judicial reasoning ideally demands that a judgment be guided not simply by an immediate end in view but by principles and standards whose validity transcends the case at hand. The judicial reasoner seeks more than a convenient result. He seeks results that meet the test of principles that are neutral and general and can be applied to cases other than the one under adjudication.

The application of the principle of judicial review to legislative as well as executive action is one of the most distinctive contributions made by America to the theory and practice of democratic government. It provides one instrument for giving effect to the recognition that a nation is a community with interests and principles that transcend the life of a single generation and that must be protected against the momentary views of shifting majorities. These interests and principles can be changed and reinterpreted: the courts themselves are not immune to changes in the working democratic consensus, and the process of constitutional amendment is always open. But the institution of judicial review helps to ensure that such changes will not take place without extensive and deliberate examination by more than one agency of government. Despite differing reactions to recent decisions of the Supreme Court in different parts of the United States, the existence of the Court is one of the fundamental circumstances responsible for the maintenance over the years of the American consensus.

#### The Federal System

The limitations imposed by American democracy upon simple rule by legislative majorities or an elected executive go beyond provisions for checks and balances and judicial review. The American federal system, with political power dispersed among the fifty states and the national government, provides a highly significant built-in limitation. Since federal authority is specified in the Constitution and residual powers remain in the states, the power of national majorities to regulate local conditions is obviously limited. Whether the present geographical boundaries between the states are anachronistic, whether the federal government needs more centralized power than it now has, or whether its powers already go beyond those proper to a federal form of government—all these are questions that are currently debated. But there is little dissent from the principle that in a continental nation like the United States a federal form of government is an important condition of continuing consensus.

#### Regulatory Commissions and Administrative Services

Political democracy, we have observed, is a system for choosing governments by electoral competition. But it is also a system in which, by the action of elected representatives, increasingly large areas of government action have been placed in the hands of independent regulatory commissions. The Federal Communications Commission, for example, or the Securities and Exchange Commission exercises great power but is only indirectly governed by an electoral mandate. Similarly, independent public corporations like the Tennessee Valley Authority, although established by a majority decision of elected representatives, are not themselves engaged in the competition for votes. As a number of events over the years have revealed, the technical independence of regulatory commissions unfortunately fails to guarantee that their members will be immune to political or other forms of influence. Probably such corruption can only be fought by the relentless use of the democratic methods of investigation and exposure. In principle, nevertheless, these commissions represent the recognition that democratic government is a complex affair requiring professional as well as political advice and decisions.

Another important branch of government that is relatively insulated from the political arena is the permanent administrative service, both civil and military. Here the principle is established that service should be nonpolitical and that loyalty must be given to whatever government holds office. It is this branch of government more than any other that brings technical expertise to the government process and continuity in the implementation of government policy. Even more, it is this branch which makes it possible for democratic government to take account of issues that transcend the next election and that are more important than the victory of a particular party. For the separate departments and bureaus that compose the administrative branch of democratic government are themselves among the pressure groups whose power must be reckoned with in the determination of governmental policy. The judgments expressed by these groups are not inevitably more immune to bias and self-seeking motives than are those of other

pressure groups. The administrative services are nevertheless peculiarly capable of organizing and representing public interests that would otherwise be neglected in the push and pull of democratic competition.

The construction and preservation of a strong administrative service, free from political threat, is a necessary condition of democratic success in handling contemporary problems. One of the most important long-range tasks of American democracy is that of advancing the respect in which this branch of government is held and of recruiting and training talented people for careers within it.

## V. The Private Sector

Elections, the rugged competition of political parties, the processes of compromise within a pluralistic social order, the working of judicial review, the principle of federalism, and the maintenance of a nonpolitical administrative service are among the mechanisms American society employs to preserve government by consent. No one of them, however, and not all of them together are enough to guarantee free government. An essential condition for securing these ideals is the vigorous and independent activity of private citizens possessing sources of power and wealth that lie outside the government sector.

### THE LINE BETWEEN THE STATE AND SOCIETY

A competitive political process is not self-sustaining. It requires a society organized on the principle that the state is only one form of human association and that it exists side by side with a host of other associations that are to some extent autonomous. A democratic state is limited by its constitution in what it can do, and it is also limited in fact by the existence of significant centers of decision-making authority outside itself. The American pattern of private enterprise and voluntary associations is not the only mold for a free society. But such a society must contain groups that can make decisions and take action without asking repeated permission of the state or depending on its largesse. The existence of such autonomous and powerful groups in a society gives substance to classic democratic slogans such as "government that rests on will, not force" and "government by consent." To act with one's friends, one's co-believers, or one's associates and to know that the state will not interfere so long as one remains within the law—this is the heart of what men have fought for under the name of freedom.

It is wrong to imagine, of course, that there is a violent antithesis between "freedom" and the restraints imposed by laws of the state. The restraining of individual behavior in certain respects is the necessary condition for individual freedom in other respects. The thief is not free to take property that

does not belong to him; his lack of freedom in this respect is what gives the right to property its meaning. In states where anti-discrimination laws in housing have been enacted, a landlord is not free to pick and choose his tenants only from the racial and religious groups he finds congenial; his lack of freedom in this respect spells freedom for members of minority groups to live where they desire. It is a society's business to choose which freedoms it particularly values. The one thing it cannot do is to choose freedom in the abstract. Few social controversies are more stultifying than those which revolve around the issue of freedom but do not specify which freedoms are desired and which are endangered.

But if restraints are conditions of freedom, they are not the same thing as freedom. As the old ex-slave is reported to have said, he liked freedom because "there's a kind of looseness about it." In a democratic society the area of legal coercion and state control cannot be all-encompassing. There must also be room, and considerable room, for individuals to do as they please and to face the consequences of their actions. The restraints that a democratic society imposes on its members, therefore, are presumed to have as one of their principal purposes the preservation or the extension of areas of free, personal choice.

In practice, this means that the law must permit citizens freedom of association. It also means that they must enjoy social and economic circumstances which actually provide them with more than one avenue to the realization of their desires and more than one channel for making their careers. If they are frustrated in one area they must have the chance to turn around and try somewhere else. For if they find themselves confronted by the same monolithic structure of power wherever they turn, they do not have freedom in a substantial sense no matter what the official rhetoric of their society may proclaim.

In a speech before the Indian Parliament, Mr. Khrushchev referred to "the monolithic pattern" of Soviet society—a society which, according to him, does not have "any intermediate social groups or strata with some special class interests of their own." He went on to say, "The Soviet society is a society of

workingmen, peasants and intellectuals with their roots in the people, united by a community of interests and a singleness of purpose. The interests of the Soviet people are expressed and upheld by one party—the Communist Party.” And he concluded, “This is what accounts for the absence of any other parties in our country.”\* It is to be doubted that the Soviet Union has quite the monolithic structure that Mr. Khrushchev describes: the record of purges in the Soviet Union, to mention only one bit of evidence, suggests something less than “a community of interests and a singleness of purpose” in that country. But in any case there is no adherent of democracy as it is understood in the noncommunist world who would regard such a statement as anything but the description of profound unfreedom. It describes a society in which all groups but one have lost their autonomy.

The monolithic structure at which the Soviet system aims highlights the quite different characteristics of American society on which American freedoms hinge. At the same time, however, this monolithic ideal calls attention to a constant danger that exists in any society and against which it is the business of a democratic society to be alert. Particularly in times of emergency, but even at other times, there is a besetting temptation in political life. It is the temptation to push reasons of state into the private areas of society and to turn nonpolitical voluntary associations into instrumentalities of an encircling political power. The extralegal persecution of conscientious objectors, the refusal of private enterprises to give employment to individuals only because these individuals subscribe to radical doctrines—these are examples of practices that erase the line between the state and the rest of society.

Such practices have not been the rule in the United States, and they sink into insignificance when compared with the scope, severity, and centrally organized character of similar practices in communist countries. Their rarity, nevertheless, does not make them more compatible with democratic ideals. They represent lapses from the principle that the state shall not be a ubiquitous

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\* From Mr. Khrushchev's speech of February 11, 1960, as reported in *The New York Times*, February 12, 1960.



and constant presence in all the affairs of men; and to a thorough believer in democracy even minor defections from this principle will be noted and fought. The issue, indeed, is not simply a matter of personal liberties. It is a matter of intellectual atmosphere. The politicizing of all important issues—the insistence on appraising literature, scientific ideas, art, philosophy, or international athletic competition always in terms of their political implications, real or alleged—does more than make cultural life a bore, which is bad enough. It implicitly converts activities that free men have always regarded as ends in themselves into instruments of the state.

#### THE EVER-CHANGING RELATION OF THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTORS

These questions bring us to a fundamental issue. It is a mark of a free society, we have said, that it draws a line between the areas that are subject to state control or legal coercion and those in which the private judgment of individuals or voluntary groups will prevail. At any given moment, however, there is usually an entire zone where the public and private sectors fade into one another. The recognition that certain private associations serve crucial social interests that must receive public support is reflected, for example, in provisions of the income tax laws which make contributions to private educational and charitable institutions in part tax deductible. Again, associations within the professions—for example, bar associations—have long enjoyed a delegated authority from the state and are recognized as the quasi-official representatives and protectors of particularly important sectors of the public interest. To take still another example, in recent years a new form of partnership between government and private enterprise has been worked out in the field of atomic energy. On all sides during the last generation new hybrids have emerged—independent public corporations, private corporations that are created to do only government work, research centers staffed by private groups and financed by public funds. Few of these activities fit into simple and conventional categories separating the “private” and the “public.”

The lines that mark off the private from the public steadily shift and move, and so does the shadow zone between them. Must employers protect their employees against the hazards of their jobs? This was once a matter of individual discretion; it is now a legal obligation. Is the owner of a restaurant that is not a private club free to pick and choose his customers? The laws of some states now answer this question in the negative; in other states the issue is still being fought. As the social and physical environment changes, the reasons that once existed for drawing the line between the private and the public at a certain place are subject to reassessment. Thirty years ago a basketball coach looking for tall players would have accepted a six-foot candidate. Today he would classify him as short. The relation between the private and the public is similar.

The fact that a sharp line is hard to draw does not mean, of course, that there is no difference between the "private" and the "public." We can usually tell the difference between a merely portly man and a fat man even if we have difficulty drawing an exact line. Similarly, in the politics of a free society, there are relatively few questions about what is private and what is public until we come to the border areas where the battles are being fought. In contrast, there are no recognized border areas in a totalitarian society: the distinction between the private and the public has in principle been erased.

A democratic society, accordingly, is recurrently confronted by the problem of where to draw the line between the private and the public, and it cannot be definitely settled for all time. Nor should we be beguiled in dealing with it by either of two unexamined assumptions. The first is that all social control must be governmental control. There are other alternatives such as community opinion or voluntary agreements among private citizens and groups. Indeed, even in countries in which governmental control has proceeded very far, it is probably less influential in the hour-to-hour behavior of men than the controls of tradition, moral beliefs, personal relations, habit, informal understandings, and the established code of manners and etiquette. In determining whether social con-

trols are necessary, therefore, it is also necessary to determine what sort of control—governmental or nongovernmental—is desirable.

The second assumption to be avoided is that each instance of governmental or other restraint reduces the total area of freedom. The compatibility of freedom with varying amounts of governmental regulation is not an issue that can be settled by dogmatic pronouncements on either side. It is plain, of course, that any instance of restraint, if considered in and by itself, is a limitation of freedom. To take a hypothetical example, if the drivers of private passenger automobiles were prohibited from bringing their cars into the central part of New York City they would lose their freedom in precisely this respect. But such a law might create conditions that gave the former drivers of automobiles more freedom to go where they wish quickly, comfortably, and cheaply. And it might also enhance the freedom of pedestrians and advance the cause of a great many other interests that are now smothered by an adherence to the principle that the private automobile has supreme rights.

Whether this would turn out to be the case is not, of course, to the point. The example merely illustrates the principle that governmental restraint is not automatically to be equated with a net loss of freedom. Much useless debate would be avoided if this principle were recognized. Only by examining the specific consequences of a particular action can it be determined whether freedom will or will not be diminished. This is not to deny, however, that liberty is seriously threatened if any single agency in the community monopolizes all economic resources. One of the clear imperatives of democratic policy is the preservation of an economic system that diffuses power and contains autonomous centers of authority within it.

There is a consequence that follows from this principle that cannot be too greatly emphasized. It is a principle of democracy that the government will not be the only rule-making body in the community, and that associations that are independent of it will have the right and the power to make socially significant decisions. This implies, however, that these associa-

tions are themselves governments in the most meaningful sense of the term. They make rules and exercise genuine and effective authority over those who work for them or belong to them, and they establish arrangements that affect the general character of the community at large. The phenomenon of widespread private government, nourished and supported, indeed, by the deliberate action of the state, is an intrinsic feature of a free society.

Accordingly, the same sort of question that can be asked of other governments can also be asked of these private governments. The democratic ideals by which the state is properly judged may also be applied to the ways in which the lives of men are governed in the private sector. If the individual is smothered, if power is excessive, democratic principles are violated as surely as they are violated by similar conditions in the public sector. The proper balance between private government and public government is always a precarious one. It is a matter of reciprocal checks and restraints and of balancing forces that are equally necessary to democratic freedom.

A democratic way of life includes more than the relation of the individual citizen to his city, state, or national government. It includes the kind of experience he has in his everyday activities and the expectations on which he and his fellows act in their private dealings with one another. The great goal of democracy is a change in the intimate quality of human experience. Democracy seeks a world in which men meet in the mutual respect that equals give to one another. It seeks a kind of life for the individual in which he will know that all men are limited and checked in the powers they can exercise but that every man is counted as important for the potential excellence that is in him. Such an ideal of life refers to much more than politics. It is for the sake of this ideal that the democratic process should be cherished and its performance constantly re-examined.

## VI. The Power of the Democratic Idea

The desire for freedom is very old; the experience of freedom is very rare. American democracy is young as age is measured by the nations of the world. Its work is far from finished. It is only one among the many forms that a democratic society can take. But nowhere has the democratic idea been tested by so large a society over so long a period as in the United States.

It is not surprising that throughout its existence the American democratic system has been a puzzle, a portent, and a symbol of hope. To skeptics, to lovers of order and hierarchy in human affairs, to those who distrust ordinary human beings when they are not held on tight checkreins, democracy in America has been a paradox. They have wondered how a system that puts its leaders under so many restrictions and gives common citizens so large a voice in the making of policy can possibly meet the trials of life in a dangerous world. To those who exercise despotic authority, democracy in America has been—and continues to be—a source of constant danger, a great center from which the belief that freedom is possible and desirable has radiated. To masses of men and women everywhere American democracy has stood for a change from the hereditary condition of mankind. It has given them the courage to hope that they need not be locked in the boxes into which birth and inherited position have put them, that they can carve out their own careers, enjoy what other men enjoy, reach their leaders and influence them, and live without deferring to a ruling group.

Can the democratic idea continue to exert this power? Can the desires and hopes it has set loose be satisfied under contemporary conditions and within the framework of freedom? America is not the only country where the democratic idea has found a home or where it is being tested as it has not been tested before. But what America does will determine a large

part of the answer to these questions. And what America does will be governed by two principal considerations: the inherent resources of its democratic system, and its ability to adjust its policies to the imperatives of the radically changed environment in which the democratic system must make its way.

#### DEMOCRACY'S CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Men everywhere are living through a change in the human scene that challenges most ideas and institutions inherited from other days. Man's relation to his physical environment has changed; his relation to other men, his distance from them, and impact upon them have changed; his sense of himself and of the possibilities of human life have changed. And behind these changes there are momentous and irreversible movements that have brought a tidal shift in the course of human affairs.

##### Technology and Large Organizations

A major source of these changes is technological innovation. Changes in technology have always been a major cause of change in government, economic relations, and social institutions. But technological innovation is no longer the work of isolated, ingenious inventors; it is the product of organized scientific enterprise and is constant, insistent, and accelerating. One of its most notable effects is upon the tempo of social change itself, which is enormously quicker than it has been and which subjects every inhabitant of a technological society to its pressures.

Technological innovation thus poses a series of issues with which our democracy will have to deal. It will need to strengthen its techniques for applying enlightened social forethought. It may have to enlarge its existing programs for cushioning the shock of technological unemployment. It will have to explore the question whether it is possible for a democracy to arrange for the orderly and considered introduction of technological innovations without limiting freedom of inquiry or stifling the spirit of invention. These are large issues that will test our democracy's capacity to manage this new and complex technological environment.

Moreover, the growth of a technological society has changed the traditional environment in which men have enjoyed freedom. Large and complex organizations have become the order of the day. In the United States they touch the lives of almost all citizens at some point. Programs for the preservation and strengthening of individual freedom in the modern world must assume the existence and the inevitability of such organizations.

Large organizations are often considered to be inimical to individual freedom because they lead to a phenomenon known as "bureaucracy"—in essence the effort to coordinate the work of many people by requiring common standards and fixing precisely their specialized responsibilities. The bureaucratic administration of large organizations, private as well as public, has been a steadily more prominent feature of all industrial societies for over a century. There can be no question that it raises issues of the sharpest sort for a democracy. The central issue is whether bigness and bureaucracy are inherently incompatible with freedom and democracy.

The issue has many sides. Large-scale organization and the growth of bureaucracy have contributed to the progress of democracy in a number of ways. In making possible the development and enforcement of general rules covering diverse techniques, multiple systems, and geographically dispersed operations, they have contributed to the productivity of modern industry and have helped create the conditions of economic plenty in which democracy normally thrives. By developing clear standards that stress performance, they have accelerated the decline in influence of class and family prerogatives and have opened new channels of achievement for able individuals. Most important of all, the administrative techniques employed by bureaucracy have generally brought a decline in the influence of personal and arbitrary authority. Bureaucracy limits the power of officials by definite rules, thereby making slavish conformity to their wills less necessary. Nor does it automatically close off competition among individuals. In America today, the large-scale organization has become a major arena for individual competition.

Nevertheless, the fears aroused by bigness and bureaucracy do point to dangers that test our society's alertness and ingenuity. The rights of individuals within large organizations require protection, and internal democratic procedures need to be strengthened. The largest challenge of all is to find ways of arranging the work of large organizations that will give individuals more discretion, a maximum opportunity to show their personal capacities, and a greater chance to feel personally responsible for the contribution they make to a larger effort. It may well be in industry that the ultimate value of automation will reside not in the increase in individual productivity or leisure time but in the elimination of routine work and the creation of more positions in which decision and discretion are essential.

Vigilance against the hardening of the arteries in modern organizations must be matched, furthermore, by encouraging their sense of responsibility to the larger community. Too many large organizations, especially in business and labor, still betray a tendency to bring up their officers in a tradition of narrow loyalty to the corporation or the union which dulls their awareness of the effects of their decisions upon the community as a whole. Such organizations can themselves do a great deal to correct this tendency. Steps in the same direction could usefully be taken by noneconomic associations.

Significant safeguards, however, are at the disposal of a democratic society. These include bringing the instruments of public criticism to bear on those who mismanage administrative machinery; assigning elected or politically appointed officials to positions of authority over public agencies; maintaining competition among private organizations and introducing public regulation as well where that is necessary. Probably the most important means for controlling the dangers implicit in large-scale organization, however, is the vigorous activity of private citizens in their political parties and private associations.

We come here to an issue that lies at the heart of much current debate about democracy. An increasing number of large voluntary associations in the United States are composed of active organized minorities and large, inactive majorities.



To a great extent, this is a consequence of the problems with which these associations must deal. The complexity and technical character of most important issues have greatly increased, and they have become national and international in scope. As never before, events and decisions in distant places touch the lives of individual citizens intimately. These changes in the character of the problems with which democratic society must grapple have inevitably encouraged the feeling that democratic citizens, despite the personal liberties and voting rights they enjoy, are remote from the centers of power and cannot bring their personal weight to bear on the events that affect their lives.

The growing complexity and scope of public issues cannot be reversed. Yet, the fact remains that more, not fewer, individuals have some chance to exert influence in a modern democratic society than in any other society that has existed. The practical problem is to find ways and means to protect and reinforce the power that individuals can bring to bear on their environments. The purposeful reorganization of our cities to provide neighborhoods that will encourage people to meet and work together is one example of what can be done. The granting of larger power to local units in voluntary organizations and the expansion of the responsibilities of employee organizations are other examples. Neither bigness nor bureaucracy need be the inherent enemy of individual freedom so long as the deliberate and active object of our democracy is to spread the experience of self-government as widely as possible.

#### The "Revolution of Rising Expectations"

These problems have a special urgency because they have emerged in a radically altered moral setting. American democracy has moved into a world in which the overwhelming majority of its own citizens, and an increasing number of people everywhere, have come to entertain new expectations about the things they should have a chance to do and enjoy and the place they should rightfully occupy in their societies. This change in human moral horizons has led to turbulence and dissatisfaction, has prepared the way for authoritarianism

in some countries, and has thrown every society that has been touched by it on a path that is strewn with perils. But every one of a democracy's fundamental principles commits it to welcoming this remarkable alteration in the feelings of ordinary human beings about the lives to which they may aspire.

Our own democracy has been the scene of this revolution for a long time and is continuing to feel the impact of this revolution in many ways. It is basically because so many of our Negro citizens take the American democratic creed seriously that they are struggling for the removal of the barriers to their full participation in our society. More broadly, there is emerging in the United States a society with a shape hitherto unknown in history. An unprecedented proportion of the population will be in schools; a steadily growing proportion will live to what was once known as old age; young, middle-aged, and old will have more leisure than all but a privileged few have enjoyed in the past, and they will have more to buy and consume.

The vista is exciting, but it will also bring issues that have never troubled any nation on so vast a scale. In such a world, more than ever before, a society should be able to offer its members something better than a life of mere accumulation and of sensation without commitment. A still further expansion of our educational effort will be required, and the demand for improvement in its quality will have to be satisfied. New public and private facilities will be needed to make leisure an opportunity for steady and cumulative personal fulfillment. Work at its best has always been a chance for personal accomplishment and social service. Particularly when leisure comes to occupy a progressively more important place in the life of the individual and of society as a whole, it must be measured by the same standard. Finally, individual citizens in the new society that is emerging will have a greater need than ever for an active, informed taste, for a sense of responsibility, and for personal standards that will allow them to discriminate among the welter of goods, some meretricious, some genuine, that are put before them. It is a demand that has never been made on so large a portion of a society.

Nor is this the only demand American citizens will have to satisfy. The discrimination and sense of purpose that America shows in using its wealth—the way in which it allocates its resources, the shape it gives to its civilization—will affect our democracy's influence abroad as much as anything else we do. There will also be required a public understanding, at once subtle, compassionate, and widespread, of the relationship of the United States to other nations. No country today, and the United States least of all, can move toward its future with its eyes turned within. It is understood, though not yet sufficiently, that the peoples of the less developed nations need many forms of help from the United States, of which economic assistance is only one, if they are to realize their aspirations within the framework of freedom. It is less well understood that such cooperation as the United States undertakes is unlikely to achieve the purposes for which it is intended unless Americans develop to a greater extent the capacity to project themselves across cultural lines. Different peoples construe their welfare in different ways and there is no single pattern to which all societies that desire freedom must adhere. The imaginative understanding of the situation of people elsewhere has always been in short supply in all nations. It was never more needed than it is today.

#### A World Between War and Peace

We come at this point to the overhanging challenge that faces our society. The United States and its allies are confronted by disciplined nations, rapidly growing in size and power, whose leaders have so far shown themselves incapable of understanding the reasons why free men cherish their liberties. A twilight world that is neither at peace nor wholly at war has existed since the end of World War II. It has led to tensions and deep anxieties and to a variety of problems that are new to the democratic scene.

One of the most perplexing problems of the cold war is how to deal with the efforts of the international communist apparatus. The perplexity arises from the skillful use by this apparatus of democratic symbols and machinery to subvert

democratic processes. The American Communist Party is too insignificant to be a present danger, but the total international apparatus of communism is powerful and is always ready to use underhanded methods. Toughness and realism are required to deal with this conspiracy. If fundamental democratic values are to be preserved, however, restraint is also necessary. The excesses of various loyalty programs illustrate this aspect of the problem. When government clearances require the individual to prove his loyalty, a basic democratic postulate is ignored.

A closely connected problem is raised by the need to restrict public access to information pertaining to military or foreign affairs. Some restriction, particularly in the military area, is probably necessary, although even this proposition has been questioned by well-informed men. But it is important to recognize that the policy of restriction at best delays, but does not ultimately prevent, the acquisition of scientific and technical knowledge by other governments. There appear to be no basic scientific secrets anywhere in the world.

A policy of restricting information has serious consequences for the health of a democratic system. It undermines the trust that ordinary citizens repose in public discussion, leaving them with the feeling that they cannot perform their roles as democratic citizens and should not bother to try, because they cannot obtain the reliable information essential to responsible judgment and action. Restriction gives the citizen a feeling of distance between himself and public problems and encourages him to leave the disposition of these problems entirely to those who allegedly know all the facts. The practice of restricting information is fundamentally disturbing, in short, to democratic attitudes and expectations. Unless its necessity is clear and immediate, it is not worth the risks it entails.

These problems bring us to the underlying issue that the present crisis raises for American society. Democracies are not warlike. Large military budgets, recurrent alarms and excursions, a state of prolonged international tension are all foreign to the normal climate of freedom. Many of the practices this state of affairs requires, such as centralized controls at many

points, long-range planning, and the maintenance of a constant state of military readiness, have not been habitual in the United States. It is natural that they should be employed reluctantly and that the belief should persist that a democracy cannot do more than respond to the initiatives taken by its enemies.

But this belief is incompatible with our wealth, our past, and the inherent resources of our democracy. Our material resources, though not unlimited, are abundant. Democratic citizens, here and in other countries, have repeatedly shown that they can pull together and pull hard when the purpose is clear. But for the long pull that must now be made, this purpose must be defined by leadership. And the support for this definition of our national purpose will have to be won in the way that enduring support for any policy must be achieved in a democracy—by honest and fearless exploration of the issues conducted on the premise that a democracy's citizens want to listen to reason and deserve to be told the facts. Hesitation in setting this process in motion reveals only a failure to understand the inherent resources of the democratic system.

#### THE RESOURCES OF DEMOCRACY

What, in summary, are the resources of democracy? What are its inner strengths that give it the power to meet its problems? The democratic system, we believe, is built to manage the complex problems of our era. It is one that aims at the most important form of efficiency. And it puts its trust in the one place where trust must be placed—in the spirit, the talent, and the intelligence of its citizens.

#### Democracy is Built to Manage Complexity

There is no alchemy that will make the problems of the contemporary world simpler than they are. Their solution depends, in every social system, on four essential conditions—on the quality of the men who occupy positions of leadership, on the information and resources available to them, on the circumstances in which they work, and on the support they receive from their fellow citizens. Examination of democracy from any one of these viewpoints suggests that in its essentials

it is built to manage complexity as well as any human arrangement can be.

The quality of the individuals who occupy the positions of leadership in any system of government depends, in general, on the methods by which they are selected. In practice this means that they are selected by a competitive process that is governed by certain rules. Competition for leadership is not a distinguishing characteristic of democracy. It is an inevitable characteristic of any system of government. Rivalry, the struggle for power and authority, "politicking," go on in every society--- openly or surreptitiously, peacefully or violently, but rarely gently. Democracy is an effort to tame this competition and to turn it to constructive use.

It is not competition, then, but the rules democracy employs to regulate this competition that differentiate it from other systems of government. Just as the rules of football make it likely that those with weight and speed will be outstanding and the rules of chess favor more strictly intellectual qualities, so the rules of the democratic process favor men of one kind and the rules of other systems of government favor men with different qualities. The democratic method of competition does not guarantee that men of humane intelligence and integrity will come to the fore. But it is more likely to produce this result than methods of competition that depend on conspiracy, violence, and authoritarian claims to infallibility.

The democratic process, furthermore, gives those who acquire the authority to govern an extraordinary opportunity for a continuing liberal education. The decisions that men make are determined in large part by the information that is available to them. When the problems with which a public official has to deal are complex, he needs information from many different quarters and he needs the chance to hear many different points of view. In the modern world the funneling of information to those in key positions is an extraordinarily complex task. Where totalitarianism tends to clog the channels through which information flows, democracy tends to open them up.

The evidence we have about the workings of the Nazi

regime indicates that the difficulties of communication are doubled when subordinates in a hierarchy are fearful of extreme punishment for their mistakes or when they feed their superiors only the information their superiors want to hear. Democracy minimizes such dangers. In contrast, it provides the general conditions for the growth of informed intelligence. It provides liberty of thought and conscience and the chance for open debate. It makes it possible for men to exchange information freely and to criticize and amplify one another's beliefs. And it does something more. In a world in which problems are difficult, it diffuses power and decentralizes the decision-making process, thus permitting men to try different ideas simultaneously. It permits leadership to arise in many parts of society. It gives energetic men multiple chances to take responsibility and does not discourage them by insisting that all their efforts be controlled from one great center.

In other words, democracy refuses to make the most tempting and the most misleading assumption that can be made when problems are complex. This is the assumption that all knowledge and good sense reside in a single, tightly-knit ruling group. A democratic system, in contrast, keeps its leaders under steady pressure. Needless to say, no social policy can please everybody, whether in a democracy or a dictatorship, and no government that has character and integrity of purpose will try to please everybody. But a democratic government is constantly hearing from those who are displeased. And if it makes its decisions on narrow grounds, if it ignores any considerable set of interests held by its citizens, the penalty is likely to be reasonably swift.

Democracy is thus a method for keeping the leaders of a society steadily reminded that their problems are more complex than they may like to think. This does not make the life of those who govern easier but it helps the lives of those who are governed. Moreover, it gives to their lives a special quality. When a government has earnestly listened to the opposition and when it has made an honest effort to reach a consensus before determining its policies, the citizens who must execute these policies are less likely to feel that they are doing so under

coercion. Their views have been asked and their dignity respected, and they can feel that the support they give their government is given freely.

The issue is more than a question of practical efficiency. It is a question of attitude. Men who are attached to democracy speak of the complexity of present-day problems partly because they are aware that the impact of any social policy will vary from person to person. They recognize as well that in every society there are bound to be individuals who suffer from the irresponsibility, the cruelty, the indifference, or the ignorance of their fellows. They therefore propose to maintain a social order that gives these individuals the chance to speak up and fight back. For they cherish the variousness of human beings and the differences between them, and count this variousness—this complexity—the mark of a high civilization. And they prefer this vision of human life to the lure of simple solutions and the seductions of a master plan which solves all problems by ignoring the existence of most of them.

In the end, the totalitarian method is not a method for dealing with complexity. It is a method by which the desperate, the impatient, or the ruthless can come to convince themselves that life is simpler than it really is; it is a method by which the weary can escape the need to think at all. When frustration accumulates in a society, it is intelligible that its members may be tempted to turn to such a method. But totalitarianism is not an answer to the question of complexity, it is a refusal to ask the question. The democratic method, in contrast, is for the confident and the toughminded. It does not promise that all problems can be solved; it relieves no one from the pain of thought or from the responsibility of facing as many facts and respecting as many human values as possible. But it accepts the difficulties of government for what they are, and it aims at a level of human achievement that is only possible when men face their difficulties squarely and overcome them honestly.

#### Democracy Judges Efficiency in Democratic Terms

Such a commitment, like any commitment, has its risks. Democracies, with their habits of prolonged public discussion,



have often been thought, even by their friends, to be inefficient. This fear is bound to be more insistent when a democracy is faced by ruthlessly organized totalitarian regimes, which seem to determine their policies with speed and to execute them with rigor. But speed, rigor, organization, and discipline are virtues only when the goals they serve are intelligent. The arbitrary fixing and refixing of goals is surely a less adequate device for insuring intelligent policies than the more protracted and self-critical deliberative processes which democracy employs. Moreover, the human cost of forcing individuals to work toward the execution of purposes they do not share or cannot accept is notoriously high. Wherever such a policy has been attempted in the modern world, a large proportion of a society's resources has been spent on secret police, political prisons, propaganda, and party functionaries. Even in the narrowest terms, such methods are more wasteful than methods that place their faith in humane education, free communication, and the open competition of opposing groups.

Moreover, if "efficiency" is construed to mean simply the capacity to attain a narrow set of purposes, then efficiency is not the only value that a democracy seeks. But if "efficiency" stands for an effort to produce the largest result for a given application of resources, then democracy does not suffer by comparison with any other system. For the democratic idea asks that a society measure the results it achieves by the extent to which it nourishes human rationality and human capacity for willing service to one's fellows. A society guided by this idea believes that the intelligence and integrity of its citizens are its richest resources. It aims to find that intelligence wherever it is and to create a fluid society that will allow this intelligence to flow where it can be used. It tries to build its power, in short, on the power of its individual citizens, and it judges the efficiency of its various enterprises in these ultimate terms.

#### THE STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF DEMOCRACY

And yet the virtues possessed by the democratic form of government do not guarantee that it can deal with its problems

successfully or that its triumph is assured when it finds itself in competition with an authoritarian social order. History affords too many sombre examples to the contrary. Democratic governments can meet and master great dangers. They have done so on innumerable occasions in the past. But they have only been able to do so when the social conditions that support democracy have been strong, and when democratic citizens have had the habits and attitudes that make democracy work and a firm commitment to democratic ideals.

Ultimately, therefore, the capacity of a democratic government for great achievement depends on the qualities that the citizens of a democracy are willing to call forth in themselves. Democratic debate is a source of strength; it is wasteful only when the debaters put forward irresponsible or foolish views. Public discussion of the policies of government can make the formulation of these policies more intelligent and their execution more resolute; it fails to do so only when citizens fail to distinguish between dissent and obstruction and when they lack the self-control and the love of the democratic process that keeps criticism within the bounds of reason and decency.

When there is weakness in democracy it does not lie in the inefficiency of the process by which democracy reaches its decisions. It lies in the values held by the individuals who take part in these decisions—in what they hold dear and in what they regard as right and wrong. The inefficiencies in the American debate over civil rights, to take a current example, are not a consequence of procedural safeguards that allow a minority voice to be expressed. They are a consequence of the actual values that are espoused. The democratic system, in short, provides its citizens with the basic instruments they need for government that is both efficient and just. But it will not give them efficient and just government; they must create that for themselves.

#### DEMOCRACY'S CHALLENGE

An analysis of democracy ends, then, where it begins. The adherents of democracy stake their destinies on the inherent capacity of the individual to play his part in the system and to

carry his share of the public responsibility. The viability of democracy does not depend on any fixed structure, public or private. It turns, finally, on the soundness of a fundamental commitment.

Democracy aims to provide a mobile society and a free political process that will give the individual the opportunity to participate in the affairs of his community and to bring to bear on those affairs the best that is in his mind and spirit. Are there enough individuals whose sense of responsibility to themselves and their fellow men will lead them to take this opportunity? Are there enough who will use this opportunity with intelligence, integrity, and care? This is the challenge that democracy puts to its citizens. The democratic faith is that they will respond.

For democracy is built on the belief that the purpose of a society is to emancipate the intelligence and protect the integrity of the individual men and women who compose it. Democracy relies on rationality as against irrationality. It is the application of mind and spirit to the serving of public ends and to the routing of ignorance, fear, and superstition. The whole conception of liberty for the individual and freedom of thought and conscience rests on the conviction that such freedom nurtures intelligence and that this in turn will carry men toward truth and away from error. It is this faith that our institutions fortify. No guarantee can ever be given that truth will triumph or that fallible human beings will win out over all obstacles. But our system provides a means for putting intelligence and good will to work.

This is what gives diversity of interests within a society and mobility for the individual their significance. It is the justification for the classic democratic conception that careers must be open to all talents. It is the inner meaning for tolerance of argument, debate, and the rough-and-tumble of political controversy. It brings urgency today to the pursuit of excellence in education, to the nurturing of human gifts at all levels, to a wider understanding of the nature of research and scholarship and science.

The citizen who casts his lot with the democratic idea

will find that it asks difficult things of him. It asks him to act with conviction while recognizing his fallibility; to enjoy, and not merely to accept, the inconvenient fact that others disagree with him; to fight hard and then to compromise; to distinguish between helping others and dictating their lives. But it offers him rewards, and the most important of these rewards are not external. They are these traits of character themselves, the chance for choice, the sense of dignity that comes to a man when he knows that he should and will be consulted about his society's affairs. The citizen of a democracy has an immediate stake in his society because that society itself stakes its strength and continuity on his resourcefulness, energy, and good will. And he will find that he can play his part in that society in many ways that go far beyond casting his ballot. He can initiate action and not only follow or applaud it; he can work for others from an inner drive and not external necessity; he can respect the rights of all his fellow men without bending his knee to any of them. The appearance of such citizens not in a special class or protected group but throughout a society is what democracy seeks and is its ultimate reason for being. The power of that idea has already transformed the quality and feeling of life for millions of human beings.

It is an idea that can put the issues of the present era in perspective and can sustain the citizens of this democracy in the purposes they set themselves. Mankind is going through one of its most fateful moments. Throughout the world there are people who have never counted in the affairs of their society, whose powers have never been tested or used, and whose feelings have never been trusted or given a full measure of respect. They are emerging from their ancient condition. Never before has mankind lived with the fear that it might totally destroy itself; but on the other hand never before have so many men and women had the chance to live in hope, and never before has there been the chance to release so much human intelligence, talent, and vitality. The democratic vision is the reason why this chance exists. To seize this chance and to act on it with faith and confidence is the great privilege of Americans of this generation.



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**What is THE POWER OF THE DEMOCRATIC IDEA?**

*The new "Rockefeller Report" says in part:*

"It is the democratic dream that is keeping the world on edge."—page 1.

"It is the function of the electorate to choose and remove a government; it is the function of the government to govern."—page 47.

"The great question is whether a comfortable people can respond to an emergency that is chronic and to problems that require a long effort and a sustained exercise of will and imagination."—page 14.

"The subtle notion of a loyal opposition takes us to the center of the democratic process of government."—page 49.



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